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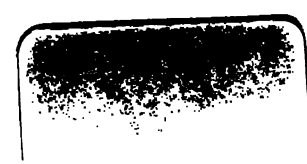
and
The Threefold Assurance



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Palmer

The Threefold Fellowship

AND

The Threefold Assurance:

An Essay in Two Parts.

BY

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PART I.

The Threefold Fellowship.

The Threefold Fellowship.

CHAPTER I.—Introduction.

THE TRI-UNE JEHOVAH.

THE Scriptures plainly teach that there is only one living and true God, and yet that he is plural in the mode of his being. The testimony as to the first is exceedingly full in the Old Testament. Two citations will suffice to show this; in Deut. iv. 39 we read, "Know therefore this day, and consider it in thine heart, that the Lord he is God in heaven above, and upon the earth beneath: there is none else;" Isaiah xliv. 6, "Thus saith the Lord the King of Israel, and his Redeemer the Lord of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and besides me there is no God." These emphatic utterances were a constant protest against the polytheistic idolatry which, taking form soon after the flood as the second apostasy from God, was through the dispersion of the nations scattered over the whole earth. In connection with this, however, it is not a little remarkable that the first name given in the Old Testament to the Divine Being should be plural in its form; and that this plural name should be the third word in the first verse of the Book of Genesis. It is also noteworthy that this plural

designation should occur in reciting the first active work of the Deity of which we have any knowledge, to the significance of which reference will be made hereafter. Nor should it escape our attention that in Num. vi. 23 to 26 the priestly benediction to be pronounced upon Israel should correspond with the apostolic benediction of the New Testament, not only in its threefold form, but in the very substance and matter of the blessing contained in each.

If these references to the plural name of God and the plural form of his benediction upon Israel should appear too slender a prop to support so weighty a truth as the trinal subsistence of the Godhead, it may be replied that the testimony is in precise accord with the progressive character of the Old Testament revelation throughout. The first hint of God's mercy to fallen man is the obscure reference to the "seed of the woman," lodged precisely in the bosom of the curse denounced against the serpent; and the first intimation of the method of grace was afforded in the bloody sacrifice of Abel in contrast with the Eucharistic offering of Cain. Yet these earliest sparks of divine revelation continued to glow through the whole antediluvian period, to wax brighter and brighter under the patriarchal dispensation, kindling into a flame through all the symbols of the Hebrew ritual, and flashing into moving beams of light through the later prophets — all converging at length in the full glory of the New Testament economy. It was thus in perfect harmony with this progressive

unfolding of God's purpose and method of grace that he should withhold the mystery of his threefold subsistence until the time should arrive for the display of his threefold office-work in the salvation of men. It is God's way to reveal himself through his works; and it is in the exposition of these that the words are spoken which explain his ways to the children of men.

In passing from the Old Testament to the New, we encounter only the embarrassment of riches. The record in every line throbs with the doctrine of God in Christ; bringing conjointly into view a threefold differentiation in the unity of the Godhead. Hence in the citations that follow, the two points of unity and diversity will not need to be separated. In Mark xii. 29 our Lord himself echoes the testimony of the old economy, "Hear, O Israel; the Lord our God is one Lord:" to which the Hebrew scribe responds, "Master, thou hast said the truth; for there is one God, and there is none other but he." Yet in John x. 30 our Lord as distinctly says, "I and my Father are one," which the Jews construed as blasphemy; "because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God." This inference our Lord, so far from disclaiming, immediately confirmed by declaring himself "the Son of God" (vs. 36). In John xvii. 3 the same lips announce the same truth: "This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." In like manner the apostle, in rebuke of idolatry, testifies that "there is none other God but one; for though there

be those that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, to us there is but one God, the Father of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him." (1 Cor. viii. 4–6.) Again, in Eph. iv. 6, he writes: "One God and Father of all, who is above all and through all, and in you all." In the second chapter of the same Epistle (vs. 18) he presents the three Persons of the Godhead in their official distinction, "For through him (Christ Jesus) we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father." In immediate connection may well be presented other testimonies affirming the Trinity in the Godhead. In the memorable discourse of our Lord, wherein he comforted his disciples in view of his departure from earth, are these words: "The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things," etc. (John xiv. 26.) So, in John xv. 26, we read the words: "When the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me." And again, in John xvi. 7: "If I go not away the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you." In these three utterances of our Lord we are not only presented with the distinction of Father, Son and Holy Ghost, but also with the interaction between the Three in the economy of the Godhead. Thus the Father is said to send the Spirit in the name of the Son: also, that the Son will send the Spirit from

the Father. In the baptismal formula, delivered by our Lord himself at the moment of his ascension into heaven, and in connection with the great commission to preach the gospel in all the world, he directs that baptism shall be administered "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." (Matt. xxviii. 19.) In the solemn apostolic benediction answering to that of the Aaronic priesthood of the Old Testament, the threefold blessing upon the church is thus announced: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen." (2 Cor. xiii. 14.)

These testimonies are but a tithe of what might easily be adduced. In the recorded discourses of our Lord he constantly affirms, in a single breath, his distinction from the Father, and also his intimate correlation with him in the fellowship of the Godhead. For example, he saith to his disciples in John xiv. 7–10: "If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him. Philip saith unto him, Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father. Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works." And again, in verse 23: "If a man love

fulness of the Godhead dwells in both, this makes the one; but it is derived to the Son from the Father, and this distinguishes between the two. In like manner the Holy Spirit is said to proceed from the Father and the Son in the same numerical essence, yielding alike the unity and the differentiation of the three. Of course, this does not explain the mystery of the triune existence; for in this communication of the "fulness of the Godhead" there can be no succession in time. With a Being who is self-existent and eternal there can be no succession of thoughts, and therefore no succession of moments. The priority is not one of time, but simply a "priority of order"[1] in the revelation which is made to us. In the presentation of this abstruse matter we are further embarrassed by the want of a common term by which to designate the three in the One. Shall we describe them as the three Persons in the Godhead? We have only the dialects of earth from which to make the selection; and yet any human term would be apt to mislead when applied to a form of existence so entirely unique as that of the Divine Being. The word person, for example, carries with it the notion of a single individual, complete in himself, and separate from every other, as locked up in the possession of his own consciousness, which cannot be invaded from without. In employing the word person, therefore, to express the distinction in the Godhead, we must carefully guard

[1] Pearson's *Exposition of the Creed*, Art. 8--On the Holy Ghost.

against the danger of making three Gods instead of one. Every science, however, has the right to its own nomenclature; and in our theological language the best we can do is to say the Father, Son and Holy Ghost are three Persons simply to indicate the threefold distinction in the one Godhead.

If the one God be thus revealed as subsisting in three Persons, there must be the equal concurrence of these three in all divine operations, alike in creation, providence and grace. By referring to two of the preceding testimonies (1 Cor. viii. 4–6 and Eph. iv. 6), and also Rom. xi. 36, the reader will perceive that all things proceed from the Father by way of eminence, as supreme in authority and dominion — from the Son, as the immediate Efficient, by whom all things are wrought — and the Holy Ghost as the in-breathing source of all life, whether it be physical life in the old creation or spiritual life in the new creation. By the use of three distinct prepositions, almost technically employed, *from, by* and *through,* the separate agency of the three Persons is distinctly marked in all the outward activities of the Godhead. Thus does the sacred book set its final seal upon the profound mystery of the Trinity in unity of the divine nature itself. It is in this concurring agency of the three Persons of the Godhead that we find significance in the plural name of Jehovah, to which reference has already been made, first given in the Book of Genesis, and so frequently employed throughout the Old Testament.

If the reader should resile from this mystery, which transcends alike the power of human expression and of human conception, let him remember that it is far from being the only mystery connected with the being of God. There is a primal mystery in his underived and necessary self-existence equally incapable of being understood and explained. All forms of being known to us have been produced — something went before in the derivation of each. Multiply as we may the links in this chain of cause and effect, it cannot be endless without denying the fundamental postulate on which all science rests — that for every effect there must be the antecedent cause. We are forced by the simple necessity of thought to find the ring-bolt which shall fasten it to some beginning. But what was before the beginning? Only God in his "eternal, underived existence." It is easier to assume the priority of one supreme intelligent Creator of the entire universe than it is to hang untold myriads of existences on their separate chains in empty space without a hook anywhere to support them all. If, then, the easier mystery of the underived self-existence of the infinite God cannot be brought within the comprehension of human reason, why should we stagger under the later mystery involved in the *mode* of his being. Let us rather bow in adoring worship before the cloud in which Jehovah conceals the glory of his presence! "Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell;

what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea." (Job xi. 7, 8, 9.) The reverberation of this solemn challenge is heard in the New Testament ascription of praise from the lips of the inspired Paul: "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! Who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? For of him, and through him, and to him are all things: to whom be glory forever." (Rom. xi. 33, 34, 36.) Know, vain man, that if thou couldst compass God within the measure of thy thought, he would be a creature like thyself. What a doom it would be to thee to wander in the vastness of infinite space and of endless duration without the companionship of him who alone can fill them both!

This Introduction cannot be concluded without drawing the reader's attention to the astonishing disclosure that the gospel scheme of salvation not only has its origin in the infinite grace and mercy of God, but also finds its method and its execution in his threefold personality. It has somewhere been stated that the Eddystone Light, on the coast of England, has its first chamber in the excavation of a solid rock, to which its four walls are glued with strong cement. Thus the imposing tower seems to grow from the bony structure of the earth to its topmost chamber, from which its protecting light is thrown over the waters of the stormy deep. In like manner we find the "great salvation"

imbedded in the very nature of God and in the mode of his subsistence. In the secret counsels of the eternal Three is the plan devised. The Father, speaking to the Son, proclaims, "I the Lord have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and will give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles." (Isa. xlii. 6.) In response to this we hear in prophecy the voice of the Son, "Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God." (Ps. xl. 7, 8.) In the New Testament we have his further declaration: "I came down from heaven not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me" (John vi. 38); and at the close of his ministry he says directly to the Father, "I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do." (John xvii. 4.)

In accomplishment of all this we find the Son, in the body which has been prepared for him, going down into the work-house and forge of his own passion, offering up his soul a sacrifice for human guilt. Upon his ascension to heaven there follows the dispensation of the Holy Spirit, turning the hearts of the children of men from sin to holiness, and preparing the redeemed for the saints' inheritance in glory. As this grace descends to the sinner from the Father, through the Son, by the Holy Spirit, so again it ascends through the indwelling of the Spirit, by faith in Christ the Son, to be presented blameless and without spot before the Father. Thus by two currents, descending and ascend-

ing, the redeemed soul moves forever within the bosom of the Godhead. Thus, both in counsel and in act, we find the scheme of grace springing out from the very nature and form of the Divine Being himself. It is such a salvation as could only be devised by the God who is revealed to us, and as executed by him in his threefold distinction as Father, Son and Holy Ghost. What amazing security does this view give to the whole system of grace, seeing that it cannot fail in a single point except through a schism in the Godhead itself. The hand trembles that writes the daring suggestion; which is only saved from blasphemy by the assurance that he who searches the heart knows it is written only to give the most intense emphasis to the truth which it declares.

Well may the Psalmist of old sweep with his fingers the strings of the Hebrew lyre to the tune of the sixty-second Psalm (vs. 6, 7): "He only is my rock and my salvation: he is my defence; I shall not be greatly moved. In God is my salvation and my glory: the rock of my strength and my refuge is in God." Equally may we join in the refrain:

> "Glorious things of thee are spoken,
> Sion, city of our God;
> He whose word cannot be broken
> Formed thee for his own abode:
> On the rock of ages founded,
> What can shake thy sure repose?
> With salvation's walls surrounded,
> Thou mayest smile at all thy foes."

If now the Triune God be thus engaged in working

out this great salvation, there should be in Christian experience a recognized fellowship with each of the Divine Persons to whom the requisite offices have been assigned and by whom they have been discharged. It will be the design of the essay which follows to elucidate this threefold fellowship, together with the threefold assurance which attaches to each.

CHAPTER II.

FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD IN THE PERSON OF THE FATHER.

"Truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ."—1 JOHN i. 3.

THE reader will perhaps exclaim upon reading these words, "Is there nothing but mystery in this religion of ours?" Having accepted in faith the first great secret of God's underived being, and then of his social existence in the three Persons of the Godhead, are we still further to individualize these that the believer shall come into personal correspondence with each? It may serve to soothe the agitation of this inquiry to remember that, both in nature and grace, the deepest mysteries are brought the most fully within our practical knowledge. What mystery can be greater than that of life, and of its propagation from generation to generation? Yet who can doubt the truth of both, upon the testimony of consciousness and of direct observation? Equally so, the mystery of spiritual life and its origin provokes the skepticism of Nicodemus in the question, "How can these things be?" Yet it is a truth brought within our knowledge through an actual experience. Who can tell what thought is, and what its connection with the greyish matter within the skull

which we call the brain? Yet every one thinks, and knows that he thinks. Thus, in the Christian religion, the profoundest mysteries relating to God, eternity and the soul are certified to us in their reality when they cannot be explained through our philosophy.

Let it be further noted that our fellowship with the Father, Son and Spirit is not with them in their hidden relations within the Godhead, but in the outward work which they perform in a revealed system of grace. In carefully marking this line of distinction we will be protected from error by being kept close to the testimony of Scripture.

The passage at the head of this chapter sufficiently affirms our fellowship with the Father. Testimony equally explicit will set forth our fellowship with the Son and with the Holy Ghost. It may be well, however, to mass together just here a few citations which connect the believer's fellowship with all the Persons in the active discharge of their respective functions. Thus, in John xiv. 1, we read, "Ye believe in God, believe also in me;" and in verse 23, "If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and *we* will come unto him, and make our abode with him." The same divine voice, speaking from the midst of the golden candlesticks, saith (Rev. iii. 20): "If any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." Reference is made in 1 Cor. xii. 4–6 to the church in her relation to each of the three—"There are diversities of gifts,

but the same Spirit; and there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord; and there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all." In Eph. ii. 18 we find the words, "Through him (the Son) we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father." Lastly, in Eph. iii. 14–17, the apostle says, "I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith." The same distinct fellowship with each of the Divine Persons is embodied in many other Scriptures, and most notably in the apostolic benedictions.

In what particulars, then, and on what grounds, can the believer hold this fellowship with God in the person of the Father?

1. *As first in the order of subsistence, the Father is the Representative and Administrator of Law, to whom supreme allegiance is due.* Man, created in the divine image, is possessed of a moral nature which at once brings him under the jurisdiction of law. His original righteousness is a derived, not a self-existent, quality — entirely dependent upon the divine holiness which it simply reflects. It must therefore be subjected to a test, in order that through voluntary obedience his will may be brought into correspondence with the will of his maker, thus adopting the divine holiness as the

regulating principle of his life. When, under force of temptation, he violated this law he was brought under the penalty of disobedience. No truth can be more solemn than this, that in no condition or state of existence can man absolve himself from the control and authority of the divine law. If, therefore, it should please God to show mercy to the transgressor, the foundation of the scheme must be laid in meeting the requirements of strict justice. Thus we find the Father appointing the Son to the work of redemption, exacting of him the full endurance of the penalty, requiring a perfect obedience to the precepts, establishing a perfect righteousness, in the which the sinner may stand completely justified before the law which he has broken. In applying this remedy to the case of an individual sinner, the first stage is distinctly a legal process producing conviction of sin. This is done by the Holy Spirit bringing the divine law close to the awakened conscience, the lower tribunal which God has erected in the human soul. Through a judicial indictment the law flashes its light into the guilty soul, until it is made to tremble in apprehension of the doom which it anticipates. There can be no proper sense of sin except as seen in the light of God's awful holiness. The natural man in his unrenewed state knows sin only under its human aspects as crime or vice. These, occurring only in human relations and against the interests of general society, have a human standard by which they may be measured. Both these are doubtless sins against God;

but are recognized as such only when seen as committed against him. It is when the commandment comes, to use the apostle's language, that "sin revives and we die." (Rom. vii. 9.) Doubtless the work of the Spirit is to produce this conviction of sin through the action of the law upon the conscience; but it is through the official administration of law by the Father that this process of conviction obtains. David's "offence" against Uriah was "rank and smelled to heaven"; but it was only when his conscience was stirred by the Holy Spirit that he breathes his confession, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned and done this evil in thy sight." (Ps. li. 4.)

Just at this point, when the penitent sinner pleads for mercy at the throne of grace, it is again the office of the Father to dispense the pardon for which the suppliant sues. The sense of reconciliation with God, through the sealing of this pardon upon the troubled conscience, discloses the fellowship which the renewed soul has now with the Father. All that has been here described in the passage of a sinner from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light has its repetition through the whole after experience of the believer. As he advances in the divine life he gains deeper views of the hatefulness of sin, turns from it with increasing abhorrence, feels more intently the joy of reconciliation with God, and thus becomes more and more distinctly conscious of his fellowship with the Father. The Scriptures give no hint that the first Person of the Godhead will ever resign this office as administrator of law. For

even after the decisions of the judgment day, the Son will deliver up the kingdom to the Father, that God may be all in all. (1 Cor. xv. 24.) Having pronounced the Father's benediction upon those at his right hand, the Son has fulfilled on earth his office as Redeemer. He will lead the mighty procession through the gates of pearl into the presence of the Father (Ps. xxiv.): saying, here are those whom thou gavest me to be redeemed; I return them to thee freed from the curse and stain of sin —"washed, sanctified, justified." (1 Cor. vi. 11.) Thus, through a long eternity, the law, which has "been magnified and made honorable" (Isa. xlii. 21) through the obedience of the Son, will be administered by the Father over the universe; and the redeemed will forever rejoice in their fellowship with him as the executive and representative of the Godhead.

2. *There is fellowship with the Father in the Sovereignty of his Electing Love.* This doctrine is so often misunderstood and misrepresented that it will be well to set it forth in the express language of Scripture. In the Old Testament the Messiah is described as the chosen or elect of the Father. In Isa. xlii. 1 we read as follows: "Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect in whom my soul delighteth: I have put my Spirit upon him; he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles." In Isa. xi. 1, 2: "And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: and the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him," etc. If, then, the Redeemer of men is thus described

as personally chosen of God, the logic of the case will require all those who are saved in him to be also chosen in him. For if "the Head" be elected, the "Church, which is his body and the fulness of him that filleth all in all," must be comprehended within the same eternal counsel of the Father. But we are not left merely to inferential reasoning, but have the most direct testimony in support of this gracious truth. In Col. iii. 12 we read the exhortation to the saints: "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies," etc. The Apostle Peter addresses the strangers scattered throughout Asia Minor as "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit," etc. (1 Pet. i. 2.) And in his second epistle he adds the counsel, "Give diligence to make your calling and election sure." (2 Peter i. 10.) Likewise, Paul opens his letter to the Thessalonian church with the words, "Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God." (1 Thes. i. 4.) In 2 Thes. ii. 13 the fuller language is employed: "We are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief in the truth." In Eph. i. 4, 5 the sovereignty of this election is thus set forth: "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good

pleasure of his will"— reiterated in verse 11: "In whom (Christ) also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." In the Epistle to the Romans the Apostle Paul, speaking by inspiration of the Holy Ghost, suspends the entire chain of the believer's salvation from the hook of God's eternal purpose until its last link is fastened to the inheritance of heaven: "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified." (Rom. viii. 29, 30, 31.) In Rom. ix. 10–12 the sovereignty of this election is illustrated from the early patriarchal history: "When Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac (for the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth,) it was said unto her, the elder shall serve the younger." In the eleventh chapter, in speaking of the rejection of Israel, he adds in verses 5 and 7: "Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace. What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for;

but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded."

The testimony of our Lord himself is properly reserved to give emphasis to the same truth. To the unbelieving Jews he says in John vi. 37, 39: "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. And this is the Father's will that hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day." In his mediatorial prayer in John xvii. he prays for all who shall believe in him as those who were given especially to him by the Father. Thus in verse 2 he speaks of the power received from the Father — to "give eternal life to as many as were given him." In verse 6 he declares, "I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me." In verse 9 he thus distinguishes, "I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine." Verse 11: "Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are." In verse 24 he writes the legacy in his own will about to be ratified in death, which bequeathes to his redeemed an inheritance of glory. "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world."

It is not difficult from these passages to determine

what this election is. It refers to individual sinners of the human race who have been chosen in Christ to be redeemed and sanctified and made the heirs of eternal glory. They are represented as "beloved of the Lord, chosen to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth"— as being made "holy and without blame before him in love"—as being made "conformable to the image of his Son" (the Christ). These and other like descriptive phrases can apply only to individual units, and never to collective bodies of men. Again, this is not an election contingent upon anything foreseen in the character or conduct of the beneficiaries; but is absolute and sovereign, resting alone on the determination of the divine will. The predestination is expressly declared to be "according to the good pleasure of his will"— and again "being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." (Eph. i. 5, 11.) So strong is the assertion of the divine sovereignty in the Scriptures that Paul indignantly replies to the objector on this very point, "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor and another to dishonor?" (Rom. ix. 20, 21.) Nor yet was it a decree originating in time from any conditions in the administration of the divine government; but before the foundation of the world, in the depth of that eternity which was before the begin-

ning. Perhaps the language of Peter, "elect according to the foreknowledge of God," may be urged in contradiction of this, and as implying some contingency in the case. A fitting occasion will shortly occur for showing that what is thus foreknown proves the decree to be resting alone upon the divine supremacy.

No statement in the Bible more deeply stirs the resentment of the unrenewed heart than this personal election to eternal life. It is alleged to be unfair, unjust and abridging human liberty. But as the Scriptures already recited affirm an election of some sort, it becomes necessary to define its limits both as to whom it embraces and to what it extends. The effort is, therefore, made to restrict this election to classes or bodies of men who are chosen to certain external privileges. For example, God saw fit to select the Hebrews, and to enter into covenant with them as his own people. In like manner, through all history, there are preferred nations who are distinguished by advantages and degrees of prosperity not granted to others. Even in ordinary life we find large classes of men in possession of dignities and emoluments denied to others. In fact, the irregularities of life are so marked through all the grades of human society that all are compelled to admit the supremacy of an ordaining will that rules the earth. Under these analogies there are some who feel warranted in allowing that God may grant even religious privileges to individuals or to masses of men which are withheld from others, without implying that their final destiny

is fixed in his eternal purpose. But if God may discriminate at all, who shall define the limit of his power, or draw the line where his sovereignty shall be arrested? We are treading upon very dangerous ground when we admit the existence of an infinite and supreme Ruler, and then undertake to measure the length of his scepter or to abridge the liberty of his will. If we consent that God shall be supreme in matters which are temporal, but not in those which are spiritual, how are we to build a wall between the two? Some election there must be. The principle is the same in every case; it must be wholly admitted or wholly rejected. It comes at last to this: in order to be fair and just, God must treat all men alike in every particular,—or he has the right to do with all his creatures as shall seem good in his sight. We can throw no limitations over his will. He can never be unfair or unjust to any under his rule, simply because he is God. His own nature, as infinitely holy and just, affords the guarantee that all his ways will be just and equal with the children of men.

The further allegation, that personal election to eternal life abridges human liberty, falls still more easily to the ground. This election remains a profound secret in the bosom of God until it is revealed in the determination of the sinner himself. No one on earth has access to "the Lamb's book of life" to see what names are written therein. What is wholly unknown to us cannot possibly be the reason of our action. There is not a faculty of our nature that can be influenced by what is hidden in

darkness. The offers of salvation are made fully and freely to the children of men; and these are dealt with just as each may please. The fact of election is disclosed in the result, and in that alone. How there can be any abridgment of the sinner's freedom of choice is inconceivable, when it is notorious that no man ever rejected the Saviour except from his own unwillingness to receive him.

Enough has been written in rebuttal of objections. The stage has now been reached in this discussion for a more articulate defence of this great truth. Sin did not originate on this earth. In the brief account given in the Bible we learn that the angels were created holy, and were placed upon probation even in heaven. Some of these remained steadfast in their allegiance; others "kept not their first estate," and are now "reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day." (Jude vi.) Almighty God is evidently dealing with the great problem of sin, in this case with an overwhelming stroke of avenging justice.

This, however, does not conclude the drama. A new scene opens in the creation of man, in like manner holy, but placed under a different form of trial. The constitution appointed for him is strictly federal. One man is created alone, as the representative and head of the entire race putatively existing in him, to be developed from his loins through successive generations until the end of time. No intelligent reader of the Scriptures can fail to recognize the reason for this peculiar economy.

It is based upon the great principle of representation in a government of law, and constructs the platform on which rests the entire system of grace revealed in the gospel of our salvation. The first Adam prepares the way for the second Adam, and the covenant of works is only the basis of the covenant of grace. For the scriptural proof of this relation between the first Adam and the second, as well as the connection between the dispensations of law and grace, the reader should carefully read and digest what is written in Romans v. 12–21 and in 1 Cor. xv. 45–49, both too long to be inserted here.

In dealing with the fallen angels, God made a triumphant display of his justice: in dealing with fallen man, it is his purpose to make an equal disclosure of his mercy enthroned in the bosom of his justice. To this end the Father appoints his only-begotten Son to the work of redemption for lost man. In this new covenant of grace a seed is given to Christ putatively existing in him to be justified by his righteousness; just as in the old covenant of works the entire posterity of Adam was viewed as existing and falling into condemnation through him. Here, then, is the parallelism between the two dispensations; which, standing together upon the same constructive principle, must be maintained or abandoned together. Yet just here, in the gift of a seed to his Son (Isa. liii. 10, 11), is found the decree of personal election, which many regard as unjust and dishonorable to God. Would it not be fair, say

they, for God to treat all men alike, without this discrimination — either giving none, or else giving all alike to Christ as his seed. It is overlooked in this complaint that sin completely estranges man from God, entailing upon him a corrupt nature, which left to itself will never become reconciled. What is the spectacle before our very eyes after the lapse of nineteen centuries since the birth of Christ? During this long period it is but a small remnant in every generation that, even in Christian lands, is willing to accept Jesus Christ as a personal Saviour. The offer of salvation made indiscriminately to all is known to rest upon the work of One in whom "dwells the fulness of the Godhead bodily": who therefore brings all the resources of his divine nature to qualify the obedience, which he renders alike to the penalty and precept of the law which man has broken. His, therefore, is a satisfaction rendered to divine justice infinitely more complete and glorious than would be the aggregate obedience of all the children of men massed together in one single act. Yet this perfect salvation, so fully revealed and so freely offered to all men, has been declined by an overwhelming majority, even of those who have lived under the full light of a divine revelation. What does this import, but that every sinner of our race would do the same if left wholly to the influence of that corrupt nature which he inherits.

But the omniscient God does not need the experiment of centuries to learn what man's treatment of the gospel will be. He knows the very nature of sin and what

man's estrangement from holiness means. Let it be remembered that there can be no succession of thoughts with God, and therefore no succession of moments. The measure of time applies only to man, who lives from one beat of the pulse to another. God dwells in his own eternity, which is with him an ever-present now. All things are with him embraced in the secret of his own eternal purpose. In his omniscience he saw the whole human race in their successive generations, heedless of all the offers of mercy, floating upon the stream of time to their eternal doom. This is that foreknowledge of God to which St. Peter refers, and of which we affirmed in a preceding paragraph that it settles forever the fact that election rests alone upon the divine purpose. It is not the foreknowledge of those who will accept the great salvation; but the foreknowledge that every soul of man will of himself reject it to the end. In his absolute sovereignty he sees fit to pluck multitudes of these from perdition, giving them in covenant to his Son to reward the "travail of his soul," and to be in him the heirs of glory in the world to come. Who shall dare to say that he has not the right to do this, when all have equally rejected the salvation to whom it has been fully offered? Shall it be said that he must either save all or none — and that any discrimination would be unfair? Let it be replied that Jehovah is still engaged in dealing with the problem of sin. In the revelation of mercy there must be the equal exhibition of justice. It must not be forgotten that in the whole method of salvation by grace,

mercy has always been seen wrought out in the sphere of justice itself. Mercy acknowledges throughout the claim of infinite justice; and justice, on its part, stands for the protection of mercy. In the results, therefore, of the plan of redemption, the vindication of justice must stand side by side with the exhibition of mercy. Thus it is that in the decree of election there are those saved through sovereign and unmerited mercy alone whilst others are passed by in the execution of a holy justice. A sovereign blessing has been conferred upon the one, while no injustice is wrought upon the other. Both left to themselves decline alike the offers of grace, and God sees fit to exercise his prerogative as the administration of law in exhibiting alike his mercy and his justice.

This doctrine, so often maligned, proves to be the pivot upon which our hope of salvation is securely balanced. Take it out of the Scriptures and out of the scheme of grace and the last hope of our salvation is destroyed. It is the security given by the Father to the Son, that he shall not lose the reward of his mediatorial work, and the final pledge that all who believe in Christ shall certainly be saved. It is therefore referred in the Scriptures to the Father as the early and great demonstration of infinite love. Thus we read, "God so loved the world that he gave," etc.; and, again, "We love him because he first loved us." It follows from this that in so many passages the name God is given by way of eminence to the person of the Father, as representatively

in the apostolic benediction, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all."

It is in the reciprocation of this sovereign love that the believer holds conscious fellowship with the Father. In the joy of a Christian hope he feels the thrill of this divine love from the Father, through the Son, to himself; and his own heart vibrates in every one of its chords to the same. He cannot but join with all the saints in the ascription of praise: "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments and his ways past finding out!"

3. *Believers have fellowship with the Father in the grace and privilege of adoption.* In Eph. iii. 14, 15 the apostle "bows his knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named"; testifying that the act of adoption pertains to the office and work of the first Person of the Godhead. He who is the Father of Christ is by necessary sequence the Father of all who are in Christ. But what is adoption? Amongst men it is simply a process of law by which one who is not the issue of our loins is put among the children, trained and treated as such, and entitled to share in the common inheritance. It is only a legal fiction at best. There is no act of legislation or judicial decree which can transfuse one drop of our blood into the veins of an alien, or transfer one feature of resemblance to his person, or transmit one distin-

guishing trait of mental or moral character. In like manner adoption with God has its legal aspects. It originates in that election of grace which has just been discussed, and in the Father's gift to the Son of a sinner to be redeemed and saved. This conveys a legal title to his absolution from guilt and to his acceptance before God. There is as yet no *actual* conveyance to him of the blessings of the covenant. To this end something more is required in this adoption of grace. Through a spiritual birth the sinner is made a child of God in fact as well as in law; precisely as through natural birth a real relationship is established among men between parent and child. Of such it is written, "Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John i. 13); also, in iii. 3, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God;" again, in 1 John v. 1, "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God." These testimonies are sufficient to show that in adoption the sinner is made actually a child of God through the new birth; and is thus doubly entitled to all the privileges of sonship.

In further proof of the general doctrine of adoption, a few passages of Scripture will be cited. In Jer. iii. 19 God asks of ancient Israel, "How shall I put thee among the children? . . . . Thou shalt call me, My Father; and shalt not turn away from me." The final fulfilment of this promise, yet to be accomplished, is furnished in Heb. x. 16, 17: "This is the covenant that I will make

with them, saith the Lord. I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more." Also in Gal. iv. 4, 5, 6: "But when the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father." Again, in Rom. viii. 14, 15: "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father." Probably no word in our science of theology more completely covers all parts of the system of grace than does this word adoption, as may be seen from all the citations we have adduced.

It is proper just here to discriminate against a false claim made by men of the world that they are the children of God through natural creation. Doubtless when first made in the image of God man was properly a child of God, because a "partaker of his holiness." But through the fall this likeness to God is lost; and all right to the title of divine sonship is forfeited through sin. Whilst, therefore, in his general providence God bestows earthly blessings indiscriminately upon the righteous and the wicked, they come to the latter by no covenant promise, but through the sovereignty of the divine will. Yet we daily hear men who have not the

fear of God before their eyes pompously exclaiming, "Have we not all one Father? hath not one God created us?" (Mal. iii. 10.) In the assertion of this claim upon a natural ground the design is obviously to obscure, if not to obliterate, the distinction between themselves and the righteous — and so to justify their neglect and contempt of the gospel. In the language of holy Scripture the title, sons of God, is exclusively applied to those who are in Christ Jesus, and who are born, not of the flesh, but of the Spirit.

In this grace of adoption many privileges are embraced, in all of which a recognized fellowship with the Father may be enjoyed. These are so intertwined, shading into each other like the colors of the spectrum, that it is not easy to make a perfect classification. There is, for example, the *sweetness of reconciliation with God.* Who does not remember the ecstasy of the moment when the burden of guilt was first removed from the soul under a sense of pardon sealed for the first time upon an accusing conscience? Who does not recall the first joy felt in escaping from the bondage of fear, and that in possession of a perfect righteousness he could stand before God with the familiar freedom of a child in the presence of its father? And yet what is the lengthening experience of the Christian but a deepening sense of this reconciliation and the fulness of joy springing from daily intercourse with God?

Again, there is a *serene trust in God in the administration of his providence.* We know that God does his

pleasure among the armies of heaven and the inhabitants of earth: still his dispensations towards us are often dark and mysterious. Yet the Christian has this assurance that to him all things come from a loving Father and in fulfilment of a gracious covenant. There is nothing penal to him in what grace has converted into a discipline of love. This earthly life is simply educational, in which the Heavenly Father trains his child for the life that is life in that it lasts forever. "All things work together for good to them that love God, who are the called according to his purpose" (Rom. viii. 28); and these "light afflictions, which are but for a moment, work out for us the far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." (2 Cor. iv. 17.) Thus, in all the changes of earthly fortune the language of Christian patience will always be —

> "Trials must and will befall;
> But with humble faith to see
> Love inscribed upon them all,
> This is happiness to me."

Still further, there is a divine *comfort in the promises.* Two of these have been already quoted: but they are innumerable, like the stars scattered over the firmament above. They may be compared to circles of electric light diffused through the Scriptures, illuminating every part. The question has been raised whether these promises are absolute or contingent. It may be replied, they are both. When made by the Father to the Son they are based upon conditions which he must fulfill;

but through that fulfilment they are made absolute to us. They are declared to be "Yea and amen" in him, thus doubly affirmed. In the yea the language is, it is so; in the amen the meaning is, so let it be. The affirmation in the one is reëchoed by the continuing affirmation in the other. Whilst, therefore, the comfort of these promises depends upon their fulfilment by the Son, there is another comfort derived from their original issuance from the Father. It is on this latter that our fellowship with the Father through the promises is particularly founded.

Lastly, there is a holy joy in the *security of our salvation.* Through all the spiritual conflicts of the Christian, which are continued to the end of his career on earth, this bright star of promise shines upon the horizon before him. There is not a quiver of uncertainty in the assurance that he will be "kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." (1 Pet. i. 5.) Originating in the believer's eternal election by the Father, fulfilled in the work of redemption by the Son, and accomplished by the work of the Spirit in his own heart, the promise shines with a threefold light upon his path. Not more surely did the star in the east guide the wise men to the babe in Bethlehem than does this promise safely lead the weakest believer into the palace of the King to see him in his beauty.

It is needless to break the unity of this topic into further details. Suffice it to say that wherever the

authority of law touches the Christian under the administration of grace, there his fellowship with the Father as first in the Godhead is disclosed and may be enjoyed.

4. There is fellowship with the Father in the *supreme worship rendered through him to the Godhead.* Our Lord taught his disciples to pray, saying, "After this manner pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name." (Matt. vi. 9.) He thus places upon their lips the language of adoption and designates the Father as the Person to be officially addressed. The sinner condemned under the law is cut off from all intercourse with God; to whom he can make no approach except upon the footing of grace and through an appointed mediator. This distribution of offices designates the Father as the representative of Deity, to whom therefore all general and supreme worship should be offered.

Undoubtedly the necessities of the believer will direct his attention to succor, which can be derived immediately from the Son and the Spirit. It is natural, therefore, that these needs should be presented directly to these Persons respectively. But this, so far from disturbing the conclusion reached above, renders it more conspicuously evident that to the Father should be directed that large worship which includes the agency of all the Persons alike. In clearing this subject of obscurity as far as may be possible, it is important to note this distinction between the more special and the

more general acts of worship and to observe the reconciliation between the two.

In order to exhibit alike this differentiation and this unification in all true worship, the following citations from Scripture may be presented: In Luke xxiii. 42, 43 the prayer of the penitent thief is addressed immediately to Christ—"Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom"—with the favorable answer, "Verily I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise." In Acts vii. 59 the dying Stephen commends his spirit into the hands of Jesus—"Lord Jesus, receive my spirit"—almost in the words in which the Christ had before commended his spirit into the hands of the Father. These two instances justify every believer in directing his prayer to each of the divine Persons in the definite relation which is sustained to either of the three. In John xv. 16 the promise is made, "Whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, He may give it you." In Eph. i. 17 the apostle prays "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him." Both these testimonies mark the distinction from whom and through whom the blessings of salvation are conveyed to us, and denote the prœminence of the Father as the one to whom the prayer is directly addressed. This distinction is more emphatically announced in Eph. iii. 14–16: "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth

is named, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man," etc. No exposition of these words is needed to call the reader's attention to the supreme fact that all the blessings of salvation emanate from the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; who, therefore, must be the One to whom our final homage must be paid. Under this view, it is easy to see in what sense our fellowship with the Father consists. In all these acts of worship—secret, social and public—we recognize the tri-unity of the Divine Being. We trace all the benefits of grace which we enjoy by the Holy Spirit, through the Son, to the eternal and ever-blessed Father—the "Father of lights, from whom cometh down every good and perfect gift."

CHAPTER III.

FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD IN THE PERSON OF THE SON.

"*God* is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship his Son Jesus Christ our Lord."—1 CORINTHIANS i. 9.

THIS text sets forth our fellowship with the second Person of the adorable Trinity under a double emphasis—as involved in our effectual calling, and as secured to us by the divine faithfulness. The topic will be found exceedingly fruitful, unfolding as it does the entire method of grace in human salvation

1. *This fellowship is with the Son, as the original source of all divine revelation.* Connecting Colossians ii. 9 and i. 19, we discover two facts: that the fulness of the Godhead dwells in the Son, and yet that it descends to him from the Father. This testimony has been adduced before to prove the true divinity of our blessed Lord, and also his distinction from the Father. It is employed now to show the relation he sustains to the holy Scriptures. In his derivation from the Father we are at the fountain-head and source of all revelation. The infinite Jehovah is in himself the unknown God, "whom no man hath seen nor can see." (1 Tim. vi. 16.) It is in the communication of his fulness to the Son that a foundation is laid for the communication of knowledge concerning himself to the creature. In this interior relation to the Father the Son is styled the "image of

the invisible God" (Col. i. 15), and, again, he is described as being "the brightness of his glory and the express image of his person." (Heb. i. 3.) Thus it is declared in Scripture, "No man hath seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." (John i. 18.) Again, "No man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him." (Matt. xi. 27.) Hence it is that the term Word is one of the names which he bears in his divine nature and relations; and it is very significant that his first recorded work should be that of creation itself. The testimony is, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made." (John i. 1, 2, 3.) For what is the created universe but one vast word which reveals to us the benign wisdom and power of the infinite Jehovah; and which it has required the science of ages to explore and unfold? How closely welded are the links of this splendid chain; the Son through an eternal generation is the only-begotten of the Father; for this reason it is eminently fitting that he should be the organ of communicating all knowledge concerning him; his first act is that of creating the world, which is the beginning of that revelation that discloses to us all the purposes of law and grace in the sacred Scriptures!

As to its kind, this revelation by the Word was only begun in the act of creation. We learn that "the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." (John i. 14.) Again, "When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law." (Gal. iv. 4.) This, then, is the great "mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory." (1 Tim. iii. 16.) This brings before us the whole doctrine of the incarnation. It is the simple fact itself which concerns us at present: for it is questionable whether its full significance is taken up in the conception of the church at large. The suggestion is absolutely stunning in itself: that he who "was in the form of God, and thought it no robbery to be equal with God, should yet take upon him the form of a servant, and be found in fashion as a man." (Phil. ii. 9.) This means that a being who is pure Spirit shall assume human form, one person in two natures, wholly dissimilar, yet strictly conjoined. But such a Being stands before us prophetically announced in all the theanthropic appearances in the period of the patriarchs and the judges, and in all the Messianic predictions of the Hebrew prophets, to be more fully disclosed in the conception and birth of Jesus of Nazareth.

What does this stupendous fact import, viewed inde-

pendently of the work of redemption achieved by him? The answer is found in the almost universal idolatry which has overspread the earth since the days of the flood. The inspired apostle gives the origin of this strange departure from Jehovah, that "not liking to retain God in their knowledge, they changed the glory of the uncorruptible God to an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things." (Rom. i. 28, 23.) The ultimate cause of this second apostasy of the race is doubtless the utter estrangement from God and the consequent corruption of nature which sin has produced; but the intervening cause, giving the line of direction which was pursued, was the difficulty of retaining the idea of an unseen Being as an object of worship. This has been the apology for idolatry in every age, to-wit, that the visible are not the objects upon which the worship terminates, but only the media through which the real objects of worship are brought distinctly before the mind. So urgent appears this necessity for a visible representation of the spiritual unseen that, in more recent times, and under the full blaze of the Christian dispensation, we find in the Romish Church the same substitution of the visible for the invisible. A material cross is everywhere paraded to hold in view the sufferings and death of our Lord; and the great atonement wrought thereby must be reproduced in the sacraments of the mass.

This is the *larger* necessity for the incarnation, not only for the redeemed, but for all who are confirmed

forever in holiness. God was made "manifest in the flesh" in order that the creature in his acts of worship might not be strained in overleaping the vast distance separating him from the Creator. To this end the only-begotten of the Father leaps from his middle throne, descending through all the grades of being until he reaches man at the bottom of the scale. Thenceforth he is the one mediator through whom God descends to the creature and the creature ascends to God. The God-man becomes thus, through his dual nature, forever the medium of worship between the creature and the infinite Jehovah. Not only does the saint on earth enjoy this advantage, but the saint in glory as well; and not only the saints redeemed and glorified, but the angels also through the same render their praise and adoration to him that sitteth on the throne. For he is "far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come; and the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all." (Eph. i. 21, 22, 23.) Here, then, the believer finds a ground of fellowship with the Son; who is not only the author of all revelation, but through the incarnation leads him up to the throne of the Father in every act of worship.

2. *There is fellowship with the Son, as the Author and Architect of grace in the work of redemption.* The first intimation of grace is undoubtedly to be found in the election to eternal life by the Father, but it has its

outworking in the scheme of redemption. The difficulties which surround the problem of human salvation could never be solved, even by a Senate of angels. The question, of course, is how can a new and seemingly antagonistic principle be introduced into a system of law. It is mercy alone that can interpose for the salvation of the sinner, yet mercy seems to contradict the justice which condemns him under the penalty. Where is the agent to be found who can solve the problem, and what shall be his relation to the Law-giver? Evidently he must be man and lineally connected with the race that has sinned. Otherwise he would have no right to offer himself as a substitute, and could not render that human obedience which would satisfy all the requirements of justice in the case. Again, he must be one who is not subject to the law which he undertakes to sustain, for in that case all the obedience he could render would be due on his own account, and could not be charged to the benefit of another. This sweeps out of view at once all created beings in heaven or upon earth. Not one such would have any residuary righteousness beyond that which is due for himself. There can be no work of supererogation on the part of a creature who is under law. Still further, the obedience required of this agent must be twofold. As the sinner is under condemnation, the penalty must be discharged; as through transgression the original righteousness has been lost, it must be legally restored complete as before. This feature is peculiar, and renders the obedience of

this agent entirely unique. Under all government, human or divine, the subject who obeys the precept is never brought under the penalty. But here is an agent fulfilling all righteousness, who must nevertheless sustain the full burden of guilt under the curse. Lastly, he must be a person who has perfect right over his own life, with equal power to resign and to resume it; for only in such a case can the obedience to law be shown to be voluntary, and also acceptable to the Law-giver.

Such, then, are the qualifications required in meeting the equal demands of mercy and of justice in the sinner's salvation. Only in the pavilion of the Godhead and within the bosom of the Father could be found the agent capable of the vast undertaking. As, in the language of Erskine, Father, Son and Holy Ghost sat around the council-board of redemption, the commission was given to the Son to accomplish the stupendous work. "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him." (1 John iv. 9.) To this end that he might render a human obedience, "a body is prepared him" (Heb. x. 4), for he was "made of a woman" (Gal. iv. 4); thus becoming strictly the woman's seed, according to the first promise, and lineally connected with the race whilst yet the entail of original sin was cut off. The human nature was thus constituted complete in the possession both of body and of soul; bringing him as man under the law and enabling him to render the human obedience, both to

its penalty and precept, which was required of any party acting as the substitute for the transgressor. It should be distinctly observed in this connection that Jesus of Nazareth never existed as a mere man; in which case his obedience would be due for himself alone. The human nature of our Lord never subsisted, even for a metaphysical point of time, separate from his person as the Son of God. At whatever moment that human nature was rendered complete by the union of body and soul, it was assumed into the union with his divine person. No possible use can therefore be made of the obedience of Christ, except to reckon it to those who shall be saved through him. Evidently our Lord did not need it for himself in his divine nature, for in that he was above law. Nor, again, did he need it in his human nature, for in that alone he was never under law. What disposal of it, therefore, remains, except to apply it to those for whom Christ offered himself as a redeemer.

In like manner his resources in his divine nature rendered him equal to the sublime undertaking. Being God as well as man, he had perfect knowledge of the law emanating from himself and reflecting his own glory. He could, therefore, go down through the depths of the law so as to exhaust the penalty. He could rise to the highest pinnacle of that righteousness which was required in the precept. There was thus an inconceivable fulness in the obedience which he rendered to both, meeting the last requisition which justice should make of the

sinner. In his atoning work there was an infinite satisfaction of all the claims of the divine law with a sufficiency in it, if need be, for the salvation of a universe of worlds.

But had this Christ a right to his own life, to dispose of it at his own pleasure? Life is always the gift of God, to be held as a sacred trust, and to be laid aside only at the call of him who gave it. In the person of our Lord, the giver and the receiver of the life are the same. It is the Son of God laying down a human life for the souls of men. It will be remembered, however, that he is acting under the commission of his Father; therefore he declares, "This commandment have I received of my Father." Yet in himself he has the power to recover it when it has been relinquished. Therefore he adds, "No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." (John x. 18.) In this dual statement he affirms the perfect voluntariness of his own death and his consciousness of power to rise again. This was distinctly shown at the moment of his arrest in the garden of Gethsemane, saying to his disciples, "Think ye that I can not now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?" (Matt. xxvi. 53.) And as the band of traitors was in the act of arresting him they instantly "went backward and fell to the ground." (John xviii. 6.) All the qualifications required for the work of human redemption are seen to meet in the mys-

terious personality of the Lord Jesus Christ. Through a sinless obedience of thirty years, he fulfils the righteousness of the law, receiving thrice from the Father the testimony, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." In the mysterious anguish of his soul in Gethsemane and at Golgotha he exhausted the penalty which sin had incurred. His heart-breaking appeal to the Father on the cross, "Why hast thou forsaken me?" reveals that the suffering of his soul was strictly penal: for the word "forsaken" has its fearful echo in the word "depart," pronouncing in the day of judgment the doom of the impenitent. Through his whole work on earth, ending in his triumphal resurrection and ascension to heaven, our Lord is viewed as the architect of grace. Through his costly sufferings and final triumph he wrought out the principle of grace and engrafted it upon law; in the administration of which Grace shall, as the queen majesty, forever sit side by side with Justice. It is, therefore, with the Son, as thus working out the whole scheme of grace, that the believer recognizes his constant fellowship. It is notably in connection with this work of atonement that the church holds frequent and public communion with her Lord through the sacrament of the supper.

3. *We have fellowship with the Son as the trustee and head of the redeemed, to each of whom he is responsible for the application of this grace.* The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews certifies that he who is "the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image

of his person, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high." (Heb. i. 3.) In his memorable discourse on the day of Pentecost Peter declares, "This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore, being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear." (Acts ii. 32, 33.) He reiterates the same statement before the Jewish council: "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand, to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins." (Acts v. 30, 31.) Nay, our Lord himself had before his death announced the necessity of his departure to the Father, saying to his disciples, "It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you." (John xvi. 7.) The work of redemption was unquestionably finished through his death and resurrection; but there remains a second function to be fulfilled in the presence and before the throne of his Father above. The covenant between the two makes the Son responsible to the Father for the seed who had been given him. The benefits of his redeeming work remain to be applied to all the saints until the last one shall be received into glory. Thus, in the testimony of our Lord given above, the dispensation of the Spirit cannot take place until his own exaltation

on high; and the office of that Spirit is declared to be wholly in the application of saving grace to sinful men.

It will not be difficult to trace the different processes by which this trustee discharges his suretyship in the salvation of all his people. In his death upon Calvary, the High Priest of our profession has discharged the first part of his necessary office in making atonement for sin. The second part remains of entering into the holy of holies. The blood shed for the remission of sins must be sprinkled before the mercy-seat in the inner sanctuary. The propitiatory sacrifice having been consumed upon the altar, the priestly intercession follows, which is founded upon it. Upon this work of intercession our Lord enters after his ascension into heaven. Thus the seraphic John, looking through the open doors into heaven, sees, "in the midst of the throne a Lamb as it had been slain." (Rev. v. 6.) The simple presence of this Lamb is an embodied and permanent intercession, a perpetual oblation of the sacrifice which makes expiation for sin. The character and scope of the intercession is presented so vividly in the words of an old divine that they are engrossed here. He is viewing the sinner under conviction for guilt, trembling at the bar of his own conscience in apprehension of the wrath to come, when the Intercessor interposes on his behalf: "This poor criminal was thine by creation, thy prisoner by his rebellion: but thou gavest him to me. I bore the curse of the law, due to his sins, for him; behold

my wounds! I purchased all saving blessings; lo! there is my blood, the price of redemption. The term is come. I crave, therefore, that, in consideration of what I have done and suffered, he be acquitted, purchased grace given out to enable him to put in his claim at the bar where he now stands personally convicted; and finally, that thereon he be absolved, accepted and entered to orderly possession of all purchased privileges."[1] These words indicate the range and the sign of our Lord's priestly intercession. It is for every child of God that has lived or shall live in all succeeding generations on this sinful earth, and covers the entire breadth of experience in every one of these. It is presented in the form of prayer to his Father, as well befits the subordination of his office; but conveys at the same time a claim of right, founded upon the terms of the covenant binding upon both the parties.

The double office of the priest being thus fulfilled, our Lord gathers around him his priestly robes and ascends the throne as mediatorial King—uniting the mitre with the crown and the crozier with the sceptre. All this the reader will remember clearly unfolded in the prophecy of Zechariah: "Then take silver and gold, and make crowns, and set them upon the head of Joshua, the son of Josedech, the high priest; and speak unto him saying, Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, Behold the man whose name is The Branch; and he

[1] Halyburton's *Inquiry into the Nature of Regeneration and Justification.*

shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the Lord: even he shall build the temple of the Lord; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne: and the counsel of peace shall be between them both." (Zech. vi. 11, 12, 13.) Having control thus of the agency of the Holy Ghost, who is subordinate to him in office as he is subordinate to the Father, the first act of administration is the communication of spiritual life to the soul dead in trespasses and sins. In his own resurrection Christ not only resumed his own life, but brought up also from the penalty of the law the redeemed life of all his people. This is stored in him, to be held in trust and dispensed to all who were given to him by the Father. The communication of this life is indeed through the Spirit, but it is drawn from the Son, in whom it was invested from the beginning; and in the new-birth of the regenerated sinner the offices of both are blended.

This involves, of course, the engrafting of the believer in Christ, and for which the distinct revelation of Christ to the believing soul is required. Here, again, the office of the Holy Spirit is involved, not only in the disclosure of Christ as the Redeemer, but in working that faith through which the believer is forever united to him. Well, therefore, may the apostle say, "The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." (Gal. ii. 20.) The spiritual life of the Christian is thus

a continuous flow from Christ, in whom is the treasury of this life through all eternity, ever flowing from its divine source and communicated by the indwelling Spirit.

Following this in the order of thought and experience alike comes the sealing of pardon upon the guilty and accusing conscience. This pardon issues from the Father in the exercise of his executive function in the administration of the law; and it is applied by the Holy Spirit bringing the sinner into perfect reconciliation with God. But it comes through the intervening agency of the Son, who has purchased the pardon and bestows it as a gift from himself to the believing soul. As there is a continuing discharge of office with all the three, so there is a continuous and enlarging experience of the peace over-shadowing the heart in its intercourse with a holy God. "And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding," saith the Scripture, "shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." (Phil. iv. 7.)

Nor should the relation which Christ sustains to the promises be overlooked. These are all "yea and amen in him," and for the certainty of their fulfilment, he, as the trustee of his people, is personally responsible. The very spirit of the gospel lies in them as they breathe the infinite and unchanging love of God to the children of men. They are the warrant of the believer's faith, and are in large degree the form in which the offer of salvation is conveyed. Covering as they do both the spiritual and temporal wants of God's people, these

promises may be regarded in the light of bank checks drawn upon the deposit in the treasury of grace, placed by the Redeemer to the credit of each individual believer. It is there for him, and it is his, to be drawn upon the demand of all his necessities as they may arise in life.

These specifications need not be multiplied further. They might be extended indefinitely; as, for example, in Christ's administration of providence, by which the Father trains and educates his children in the school and under the discipline of grace, until they shall be presented before him in glory, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing. The reader cannot fail to see in what has been already presented the variety of relations in which he stands to Christ, and the fulness of the fellowship which he may hold with him as the administrator of the covenant. In them all he will be constrained to add, "Whom having not seen, we love; in whom, though now we see him not, yet believing, we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." (1 Peter i. 8.)

4. *We have specific fellowship with the Son as the immediate object of our faith in the work of redemption.* God and the sinner are thrown widely apart; and they are kept asunder by two repelling forces. The holiness of God drives the sinner ever away from itself; the sinfulness of man withdraws him ever from the divine presence. Under the combined forces, how shall they ever be brought together? The solution of the problem may almost be illustrated through a diagram. It consists in

throwing a mediator between the two parties, which shall be equally related to both and equally the exponent of mercy and of justice. The reconciliation is to be found in a righteousness which shall, on the one hand, fulfil all the demands of the law, and meet, on the other hand, all the necessities of the transgressor. This reconciliation is accepted on the part of God, and is offered in the gospel to the acceptance of the sinner. Here a difficulty emerges which is real and not fictitious in its character. It is that man is created with an inextinguishable conviction of his responsibility for his own sins. How, then, shall he transfer this responsibility to another, and consent to stand before God in a righteousness which is not his own? At first he does not perceive how it can ever be made his own; and he staggers under the double difficulty of technically accepting the proposed substitute and practically how to get rid of his own self-righteousness, which clings to him as though it were a part of his being. Yet this offered righteousness must become his if he is to be saved, and it is in the full and free acceptance of it that his sense of personal responsibility is to be met. Here is shown the power of that faith by which the sinner accepts Christ and is forever knit to him as his Saviour and Lord. The Holy Spirit first of all discloses Christ as perfectly competent to work out this righteousness, and then enables the sinner honestly to accept it with an abiding trust. In the language of the Shorter Catechism, "He (the Spirit) doth *persuade* and *enable* us to embrace Jesus Christ,

freely offered to us in the gospel." Shall it be asked how this is done? The answer is that it is the first act of the spiritual life infused into the soul at the new birth. Natural breathing is the evidence of natural life; we breathe in order to live, but we must first live in order to breathe. So a divine faith is the first breath of the new-born soul, with which it first embraces Christ as the sole author of salvation.

This righteousness, by which the sinner is now justified, consists of two parts—first, in the exhaustion of the penalty and the perfect obedience required in the precept. This faith, therefore, must distinctly embrace both. It matters little whether there is a full consciousness of this acceptance at the moment of conversion; or whether it breaks upon the soul like the dawn of the morning, widening into the splendor of noon. The Holy Ghost has different ways of entering into a sinner's heart—as seen in the cases of Lydia and the jailer, in the sixteenth chapter of Acts. It is the same acceptance of the Redeemer as our personal Saviour in the single act at the beginning, and growing through a thousand repetitions into the permanent habit which comes finally to know neither a doubt nor a fear. It is hard to see how a Christian can fail to grow in the consciousness of an increasing fellowship with Christ in the continual acceptance of this justifying righteousness.

There is another view of faith in the acceptance of Christ Jesus as the object of our personal love. It scarcely needs to be emphasized that love is always

directed towards a person. We may admire the qualities of a friend, but we love the friend in whom these qualities reside. So there may be an intense and holy admiration of the attributes of the Divine Being, but it is God himself to whom we give the deep and reverential love of which we are conscious. But it is this God viewed, not simply as our creator and preserver, but as "God in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." (2 Cor. v. 19.) Here the doctrine of the incarnation comes in with its inexpressible relief and comfort. He is not a God afar off, but nigh at hand. He is the God manifest in the flesh; who wore our nature that he might be of kin to us, our elder brother, bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh. He is clothed with all human sympathies and affections which are sinless; one who has borne our griefs, carried our sorrows; himself preëminently the Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. He is therefore by experience prepared to enter into the deepest sorrows of the human heart; whilst in his divine nature, he can bring all the consolation of a divine love to sustain us in our anguish. Who is there of God's children who has not felt the support and joy of this human sympathy in a divine Saviour at times when the heart has been bruised and almost crushed under the successive bereavements of life.

Yet there is even a greater support from the human sympathy of Christ which comes to us in our worship directed to the Father. The prayers and the praises,

which we seek to render, appear so contemptible when addressed to the great and dreadful God. We shrink from them, even after they have been offered; and this seems to cancel the faith in which they were first attempted. But infinite consolation is found in the fact that the great High Priest stands for us before the throne, gathering up our prayers in his golden censer, and presents them all perfumed with the incense of his merit at the mercy-seat. He translates the poor language of our earthly homage into the sacred dialect, which is never heard outside the pavilion of the Godhead. This gives us sweet contentment, even under the discomfort of conscious deficiency in all our attempts to serve and worship God.

5. *We have fellowship with the Son, as he is the portion of our inheritance.* In Eph. i. 11 we learn how this inheritance is acquired: "In whom (Christ) also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." In Col. i. 12 it is styled an "inheritance of the saints in light." And in 1 Peter i. 4, 5 it is described as "an inheritance, incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time." In Rom. viii. 16, 17 we have the title upon which it is assured to us: "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God and

joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together." A twofold measure of its greatness is here given—that true believers are "heirs of God" and "joint-heirs with Christ." It would be more than sufficient to dwell upon the first. To be "heirs of God" implies that we are made partakers of his holiness and of his blessedness, just as far as these may be brought within the compass of a finite being. This would seem to be beyond the reach of the loftiest imagination. But this heirship of God means immeasureably more—that we come under the protection of all the divine attributes, and in a sense to be enriched by them. His truth is the only boundary of our knowledge; his wisdom, a pledge for our guidance; his power, the guard for our protection; his goodness, the only limit of our supply; his mercy, the assurance of his continuing love; and his holiness the only measure of our sanctification. No one can meditate upon this without exclaiming, who is "able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye may be filled with all the fulness of God!" (Eph. iii. 18, 19.)

This view of the saints' inheritance does not pertain, however, to the topic under consideration, which is rather the joint "heirship with Christ"—"if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together." The complete identification of the believer with his Lord, so constantly pressed upon our attention

in the Scriptures, is a well of consolation in our earthly career. In the distressing conflicts with indwelling sin, it is a comfort to know that our blessed Redeemer is still carrying on his warfare with the powers of darkness, and that our victory is made sure through his antecedent triumph. So, again, in all the discipline of trouble, pain and sorrow, we are but sharing our Redeemer's humiliation here on earth. Is it not in the contemplation of this that the apostle uses language which only the consciousness of inspiration would justify? "Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church." (Col. i. 24.)

A slight analysis of this joint heirship will enable us better to understand its nature. The glorified saint, for example, will then enjoy the full fruition of all the hopes which he cherished in Christ here below. His wanderings will have ceased — his conflicts will be over—his tears of sorrowing repentance will have been wiped away—he has passed through the gates of pearl with the tread of a conqueror. He may bear aloft the scar of many a wound, but they will then be converted into scars of honor. The Lord will then have "perfected that which concerneth him" (Ps. cxxxviii. 8.), and he is safe forever in the everlasting arms. But this joy of contrast with the past will speedily give place to the higher bliss of looking into the face of the King. Our Lord seems to intimate this as the peculiar import of the saints' inheritance when he prays "that they may

be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me." (John xvii. 24.) It is now that the blessed transformation is completed, when, not as in a glass, but face to face, "we behold the glory of the Lord, and are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." (2 Cor. iii. 18.) Who of us has not longed, especially in seasons of darkness and sorrow, like Mary in the garden, to clasp the knees of his Lord; which, forbidden on earth, will be granted forever in heaven? Again, this connection with the Redeemer will be drawn even closer when we are brought around his person as the immediate representatives of his grace, and giving the first note of the new song, which shall be chanted forever before the throne, and of which the angels can only swell the chorus: "Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people and nation; and hast made us unto God kings and priests." (Rev. v. 9, 10.) It will be the unceasing wealth of glory to the saint thus to share the triumph of the Redeemer in dealing with the problem of sin; so as, in the widest sense of the prophecy of Daniel, to "finish the transgression and make an end of sin" forever. Thus it will be that the Redeemer also shall enjoy "the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints." (Eph. i. 18.) Surely in the hope of such an inheritance the believer cannot fail to have a constant fellowship with the Son.

CHAPTER IV.

FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD IN THE PERSON OF THE HOLY GHOST.

"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you."—2 Cor. xiii. 14.

FELLOWSHIP with the Father and the Son having been discussed in the preceding chapters, the third clause in the above verse alone claims our attention in this. The term communion does not vary in its meaning from fellowship; as they are both the translation of the same word in the original. It is, however, singularly appropriate in our English version to express the peculiar blessing pronounced in this apostolic benediction as coming from the third Person of the Godhead. As will be especially noted hereafter, all the operations of this agent are strictly subjective—wrought within the experience of the Christian, and thus in common with him. Because of its hidden character a veil of mystery shrouds the work of the Holy Spirit, like the mist which sometimes covers a mountain landscape. In this respect it is more difficult of interpretation than the work either of the Father or the Son. The action of these is disclosed through the medium of law—the one in administering, and the other in fulfilling it. Both operations, therefore, stand out to view as objects to be recognized.

We are able for instance to go around the four sides of the square, and view the altar of sacrifice for human guilt. With equal mental discrimination we can discern the Father seated upon his throne and dispensing pardon to the penitent sinner. But in the work of the Spirit we are called to consider his agency as carried on through the complex machinery of all the faculties of the human soul. Indeed, there is a vagueness in the very name, Spirit, as well as in the indefinite word, procession: both of them, with a similar design, concealing the nature of his distinction from the other persons of the blessed Trinity. The one awful secret as to the mode of the divine subsistence will doubtless never be disclosed through all eternity.

Notwithstanding the obscurity which marks the line of his distinction from the Father and the Son, the proofs are abundant which establish his own personality and the personal character of his work. The Scriptures caution us not to grieve, nor to vex, nor to resist the Holy Spirit, which terms denote sympathies and affections which belong only to an individual person, who stands in personal relations with other parties. A stronger emphasis is laid upon this fact in the still more awful warning in reference to the sin against the Holy Ghost; with the terrific declaration that it can neither be forgiven in this world, nor in the world to come. (Matt. xii. 32.) It would be simple impertinence to construe such a warning, reaching in its execution into the distant eternity, as being directed simply against

an impersonal influence, as some pretend. All the operations of the Spirit within the soul of the believer will go still further to prove the reality of a personal agency in every case. Whilst the mysteriousness of the Spirit's work may render the investigation difficult, its intense practicalness as woven into the texture of our religious life makes the knowledge of it all the more important.

1. *There is fellowship with the Holy Spirit in the relation he sustains to the holy Scriptures.* It has been already shown in what sense the Son is the original source of all revelation. As the Word, he discloses the thoughts and purposes which lie in the mind of the infinite Father. But if these are to be conveyed to man in a permanent record, they must be strained through a human mind and be embodied in human language. Here is introduced the agency of the third Person of the Godhead. It is his office to convey God's eternal truth into the mind of prophet and apostle, so as to be both accurately conceived and safely expressed. This process is what is understood in the use of the word inspiration. Revelation and inspiration are therefore strictly correlative. The one gives the divine side and the other the human side of the book we call the Bible. Inspiration is, then, the outer halo which surrounds the head of the Revealer—the second incarnation of him who is "God manifest in the flesh." It is through the combined work of the Son and Spirit that we have in the sacred Scriptures an authoritative, because an infallible, exposition of the divine will in creation and in

grace. In the language of the Book itself, "Holy men of God spake as they were moved (borne forward) by the Holy Ghost." (2 Peter i. 21.)

It may be asked how was this marvellous effect produced? By what method did the Holy Ghost render men perfectly infallible, both in their conception and in their expression of divine truth? The mystery deepens when we consider the difficulties on both sides of the problem. On the one hand, the truths which the writers record are the secret things of God, which they could only know as directly conveyed to them. On the other hand, there is every mark of originality with the writer of each of the sacred books. The individuality of Isaiah is just as distinct from that of Jeremiah, as Jeremiah himself can be from Ezekiel. Paul is as different from John as Peter is from James. And so, from the beginning of Genesis to the end of Revelation, through the entire canon, each writer puts the seal of his individual genius and taste upon his own composition. The subject matter is always and exclusively divine, while the medium of conveyance is not only distinctly human, but also characteristic of the author whose name it bears.

Let the mystery be accepted without explanation; the certainty of the fact is all that is important to us; how it is accomplished is the secret which remains with God. After all, the mystery is no greater than those which encompass us on every side in the sphere of nature, as well as of religion. Who can explain how an

external object shall pencil its image on the eye, which, transmitted to the brain, will give the mental conception of a tree, a mountain or a landscape? Who can explain how one mind can, through a word or a sign, bear upon another mind, and fill it with thoughts and emotions just as it may please? Why, then, should we stumble at the fact of the Divine Spirit's influence upon any human mind to give it the knowledge he desires? What, indeed, is mind? who can tell us its nature? We may define it as a part of our spiritual being. But, then, what is spirit? What do we know of its essence or of the mode of its working? The truth is, we are plunged into a sea of mysteries; and the man who will accept no mystery may as well abandon thought altogether. The ultimate truth is, that we can know nothing of God except what he is pleased to reveal. The final issue, then, is simply that infidelity must wage its war against that revelation. If this should be overthrown, then we are without any knowledge of God, eternity and the soul. The discoveries of science and the refinements of philosophy range within the earthly sphere alone. And without the knowledge of God man is but a phantom, the world a bubble, and this life only a dream. In all, therefore, of strength and comfort which may be drawn from the sacred volume the believer finds his fellowship with the Holy Ghost.

2. *The believer has fellowship with the Holy Ghost as the giver of spiritual life in the new birth.* Here, again, the work of this blessed agent intersects with

that of the eternal Son. The spiritual life, which was lost in the transgression, is that which was redeemed through the sufferings and death of Christ on the cross. This, now, is the life which is restored by the Holy Spirit to the soul claimed by this Sufferer as his own. It is this necessity of a spiritual birth which our Lord announces to Nicodemus as marking the transition of a sinner from the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of God. This impartation of a new life to man is represented in the Scriptures under different names. It is termed a creation, a resurrection, a quickening, etc.: all these expressing the same fundamental idea of the giving of life, though under different conditions. In none of them, however, is it to be understood that in the new birth there is the absolute creation of a human soul. In the fall, man did not forfeit any of the natural faculties necessary to a being who is still under law, and who, therefore, remains voluntary and responsible for all his acts. The right direction of these, however, is lost, as no longer moving on the plane of holiness, through the soul's entire estrangement from God. It is the replacing of this soul in its proper relation to this holiness of God which is accomplished in the new birth. The spiritual life is the infusion of a new principle and power, which shall thenceforward control the whole outward and inner being of the man. As far as the spiritual may be compared with the physical or natural, this may be illustrated by the mariner's compass. This consists simply of a thin, narrow piece of metal about

the length of a finger, most delicately poised upon its pivot, that it may be perfectly devoid of all friction. Its peculiarity is that it is thoroughly magnetized, so that it can only rest when lying in the magnetic meridian, pointing always to the north. The mariner can thus determine the direction of his vessel by measuring the deflection from a course due north. Now, the will of man in the first creation was in like manner impregnated with the principle of holiness, moving always in a right direction towards God as the source of all holiness. But the will of man in his fallen condition is like that mariner's needle when it has become demagnetized. It has lost its virtual principle, which before caused it to lie in the direction of holiness. When, however, the Holy Ghost restores the spiritual life to the sinner, the reinvestiture of the soul with the holiness it has lost is like restoring the magnetic quality to the needle and fitting it again for its appropriate function.

All this is mysterious enough. Who knows what magnetism is in itself? But we know this property of it which has been described, and the practical uses to which it can be applied. We know that the magnetic needle is so balanced as to be perfectly free in its movements, and yet be controlled by its own magnetic property. So the will of a renewed man is free in its own action, and yet is under the control of the holiness with which it is endued. In like manner we cannot tell what animal life is; nor how its power acts upon all the organs of the body so as to perform their necessary

functions. Why should we expect to understand the more subtle agency of the Divine Spirit, as he works upon and through the more mysterious and delicate organism of the human soul?

The very name given to this Person of the Godhead, Spirit or breath, implies that he is the manifestation of life, in its secrecy and power. The sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost was "the sound of a rushing mighty wind." (Acts ii. 2.) So our Lord, on his first appearance to the collected disciples after his resurrection, breathed upon them and said, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost." (John xx. 22.) Again, if we reflect the light of the New Testament upon the Old, we read in the history of the creation that "the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters" (Gen. i. 2)—indicated under the term wind. Thus, brooding over chaos as the principle of life, he became the separating force which "divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament." (Gen. i. 6.) In the same history, when God created man he "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul." (Gen. ii. 7.) Who but the Spirit, or breath of God, should breathe this life into the inanimate clay; and through the infusion of an immortal soul, make the indwelling of this Spirit the necessary condition of the life of the body through all time? We may stretch our conception even beyond this. The most marvellous feature of our modern science is that it discloses the

hiding of God's power throughout nature. What are all these mysterious forces of nature but the products of his secret power in matter itself? What is force but the expression of will? And what is will but the property of a being that has life? And what is life but the breath of the Creator himself? And who should be the breather of this life, whether in nature or in grace, but he whose style and title is the Spirit or Breath of God? Whatever may be thought of this as merely human speculation, it is certainly true that God reveals his secret power through the scheme of grace in the salvation of men. And the Holy Spirit is the immediate agent by whom this power is wrought, lifting the soul of man out of death itself into the life of God forever. In the possession of this spiritual life, and in all its conscious activities, the renewed soul must recognize its fellowship with the Spirit.

3. *The third Person of the Godhead, in due subordination of office, becomes the efficient agent in applying the purchased salvation to sinners of our race.* This brings into view his permanent indwelling in the heart which has been renewed. The distinct promise of our Lord is, "I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever." (John xiv. 16.) The word here translated Comforter is *paraclete,* which signifies one called in from without to assist us. For example, one embarrassed in his business; will call in some one learned in law to assist him with his counsel. Again, one prostrate with disease

needs an able physician to restore him to health. Thus our Lord is the one advocate interposing before the bar of divine justice for us sinners; "if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." (1 John ii. 1.) The Holy Ghost becomes the other advocate or comforter, whose office is to cleanse us from sin. Their two offices interlock and become equally necessary to our salvation. Hence his permanent indwelling for the purpose of stimulating and expanding that spiritual life which he has infused. This constant impelling force may be traced in many particulars. The very first to be noticed is the manifestation of this spiritual life in the act of faith, in which the Lord Jesus is accepted as a personal Saviour. "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God." (Eph. ii. 8.) It is in this our sense of responsibility under the law is distinctly met, removing a legal difficulty to which reference has already been made. It is in this way we dispose of those sins of which we are conscious, by laying them on a substitute, to be dealt with under the law which we have broken. In this act of faith also is effected our mystical, but real, union with Christ. Thus we draw continually upon that life which has been stored in him as our Redeemer, and which the Holy Ghost first infused and constantly invigorates. Thus the believer is made one party with Christ, lashed together by two reciprocal bonds. The bond on the part of the believer is this act of faith, which makes him one with Christ; the bond

on the part of the Redeemer is this gift of the Holy Spirit, through whom Christ is made to dwell in us. The two corresponding and scriptural phrases, Christ in us and we in Christ, cover, through justification and sanctification, the whole ground of our salvation. It is in the exercise of this faith that we grow from babes unto "the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." (Eph. iv. 13.)

The reader should observe the harmony of the gospel plan in the close connection here of faith with repentance. They are themselves distinct acts of the soul, yet so strictly conjoined that they are but the two poles of the same procedure. While faith is looking upon Christ as the Saviour from sin, repentance is looking at the sin which needs the Saviour. It is an act in which the penitent repudiates his sins and puts them away from him, with the purpose of a new and holy obedience of the law, which has now become to him the law of Christ. It is only the Divine Spirit who can quicken the conscience into a true sense of sin, and who can quicken the will into a fixed purpose to forsake it. It is delightful to see how completely, through these conjoint acts of faith and repentance, sin is covered up forever from the view of God and man. The former no longer sees the sin which is covered under the blood of the sacrifice: the latter no longer sees his sins borne away by the scape-goat and lost in the wilderness forever.

Next in the sequence of thought follows the pardon which the Spirit seals upon the troubled conscience, with

the sweet sense of reconciliation with God. Through the intercession of the High Priest within the veil, this pardon is obtained from him who sits upon the throne; and the order is issued for its dispensation to the sinner. To the Holy Spirit, as the vicar and representative of the Son, is assigned the immediate application of the same. An order for the pardon of a criminal brings to him no comfort until, through its execution, the prison doors are thrown open and he breathes again the free air of heaven. It is the function of the Holy Spirit to release the sinner from the bondage of the law and introduce him into the liberty of the gospel. This sense of reconciliation with God may again and again fade away from the soul which relaxes its hold upon the person and work of the Redeemer. But just as often does the Holy Spirit revive the faith in the promises of the Word. We know not the power in nature which rolls back the ebbing tide from the heart of the sea, again to dash its foam against the shore. Even so in the ebbing of the spiritual life, its returning current sweeps on with a broader flood under the increasing power of the Spirit's influence. The sense of pardon is sweeter and stronger the oftener it is renewed, and the reconciliation with God becomes the more precious after each estrangement. It is marvellous how often protection is found in the very weakness which betrays into danger. The human eye, for example, guarded as it is by the fringe which hangs over it, finds its greatest security in that exquisite sensibility which immediately drowns

out the offending mote in a flood of tears. So the chief security of the believer is to be found in that tenderness of conscience which recoils from every temptation, and which derives its sensibility alone from the quickening energy of the Divine Spirit. Thus, through the whole period of the believer's discipline on earth, there is required this constant sealing of pardon upon the conscience, with its renewed sense of reconciliation with God.

Almost in logical connection with this is the Spirit's action in completing the believer's adoption into the family of God. This adoption finds its legal authority in the decree of the Father, and is grounded upon the work of the Son, as the High Priest, making both atonement and intercession for us. But the actual transfer of an alien so as to make him really a child of God is the work of the Divine Spirit. Thus we read in the Scriptures: "As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, not of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." (John i. 12, 13.) "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." (Rom. viii. 14.) "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: . . . beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." (1 John iii. 1, 2.) This

transition is accomplished in the moment and in the act of the new birth. Just as natural birth makes one a child, so it is with spiritual birth in the family of God. Again, as in nature those who are children have the filial spirit which makes the natural relation; so in grace the spirit of adoption is bestowed upon those that become the children of God. Thus it is written: "Ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father." (Rom. viii. 15.) This requires the constant testimony of the Spirit, the author of the spiritual birth which first placed us among the children and first infused the spirit of adoption. He must, therefore, through our chequered life upon earth, renew and strengthen the spirit of children. Upon him in this delightful function of his office will depend the closeness and the sweetness of our intercourse with him who is our Father and with him who is our Elder Brother; and it may be added also, the sweetness of our intercourse with all who have "like precious faith" in the same precious gospel of our salvation.

Among these specifications of the Spirit's work in the application of redemption, his agency in the administration of the promises must not be overlooked. This brings distinctly before us his function as a teacher. This our Lord sets forth, and also his apostles: "The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have

said unto you." (John xiv. 26.) "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you." (John xvi. 13, 14.) "God hath revealed them (things unseen) unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God." (1 Cor. ii. 10.) "The anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him." (1 John ii. 27.) As he has by inspiration given in the Scriptures an infallible record of divine truth, so it is his province to illuminate that word so as to throw its reflected light into the darkened mind of man and fill it with knowledge of God and eternal things. A twofold operation is here conjoined—the illumination of the word, and the opening of the understanding to receive it. Both are necessary to unfold the knowledge of Christ and of the salvation which he has wrought. "Search the scriptures," saith our Lord, "for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me." (John v. 39.) Again it is written: "Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow." (1 Peter i. 11.)

All this truth lies in the promises, for the gracious confirmation of our faith. It is therefore the special function of him who is the "Comforter" to bring these to our remembrance and to apply them for our support and guidance through all the discipline of this earthly life. It was for this our Lord went to his Father, that he might send the Spirit to remain as his representative, finishing his work of redeeming love here below. It is through the administration of these promises that the believer's sanctification is secured; since these form, as it were, the handle by which he takes hold of all the truth of God communicated for his appropriation and use. Thus we are told, "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." (2 Peter i. 4.) It has been said with epigramatic force that the promises are the sanction of the gospel, as the penalty is the sanction of the law. This is a very broad line drawn between the two. The law binds duty upon the conscience under a severe threat; but the gospel enforces its obligations through a sweet assurance of divine help in their discharge. This distinction fairly meets the question which has been raised, whether the gospel is in any sense to be construed as a law. Most certainly not in the meaning of those who contend that the operation of grace is not to provide a complete righteousness for the sinner, but only to cut down the requirements of the law so as to bring them within his

diminished ability. This would simply be to reëstablish the covenant of works, by which the sinner obtains salvation through his own righteousness instead of that which Christ has wrought. Such an arrangement would be a compromise, in which the Divine Being would not only be robbed of a portion of that which is his due, but would compel him to receive the balance in very depreciated coin. The gospel, on the contrary, supremely vindicates the authority of God in that it requires perfect fulfilment of law in the redemption of the sinner. Every word of God, whether in law or grace, must be authoritative, as expressing the will that is supreme. The distinction lies just here; the authority of law is strictly maintained in the gospel, but the obedience rendered to it views it as the law of Christ. Its sanction is the promise of eternal life, and therefore it is obeyed through the principle of love, and not of fear; not as the ground of our salvation, but as the evidence of it. The salvation is already begun in the renewal and partial sanctification of the believer. The obedience springs from the power of a divine life already in the soul, and is continually sweetened by the tokens of favor and acceptance which come from above.

Closely allied with the administration of the promises is the Spirit's aid in the office and duty of prayer. If through the pardon of sin we have reconciliation with God, there should ensue an easy and delightful intercourse with our Father in heaven. This now is secured to us through the double intervention

of the Son and of the Spirit. The former makes intercession for us in the chancery above, presenting our claims to all the blessings of salvation, and securing the grant of them under a judicial decree from the Father. The latter, as the intercessor below, transfers the prayer from the suppliant on earth, and thus it ascends to the throne of grace as the prayer of faith, enforced by the double endorsement of two of the parties to the covenant of redemption. These statements are here made under the authority of what is written in the scriptures: "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the heart knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God." (Rom. viii. 26, 27.)

A very slight analysis of this important passage will disclose the nature of that courage which comes into the fainting heart of the Christian. "The Spirit helpeth our infirmities;" he does not remove them, but helps us to bear them. The word here used is very strong. It presents the picture of one who takes hold of our burden with us, on the other side of it, as our opposite. The case is so urgent that we know not how to pray, or what to ask in the prayer. The Holy Spirit comes to our relief by placing the right petition upon our lips, and filling us with the proper desire and fluency in present-

ing it at the mercy-seat. His intercession is not outside of us, like that of our High Priest above. It is wholly within us, by a direct influence upon the soul, upholding, teaching, guiding, strengthening the faith and stimulating the hope of acceptance with God.

Just at this point, let the reader consider the ground of that confidence which is now inspired. He to whom the prayer is addressed "knoweth the mind of the Spirit, that he maketh intercession according to the will of God." In this wonderful economy of grace the Father looks into the prayer of his struggling child and finds in it the wish and desire of the Holy Spirit. This he cannot fail to satisfy, because the prayer of the creature has now become an official demand of the divine agent whose province it is to urge the claim. Nor is this all. This interposition of the Spirit is seen to be in full accord with the will of the Godhead as expressed in the eternal covenant of grace. The Father originally designated the blessings to be conveyed; the Son has executed the terms on which these were to be purchased; and the Holy Ghost has fulfilled his office in working the whole scheme out in the prayer which he has inspired in the heart of the suppliant. It is written, "A threefold cord is not quickly broken:" and here is the threefold purpose and agency of all the Persons of the Godhead. How can it fail at the very moment of its fulfilment? Surely this must be "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man"; which takes its utterance from the lips of the divine Intercessor's pleading, at the footstool

of Infinite Mercy, for that which Infinite Love designed originally to bestow.

Finally; in this general survey of the Spirit's work within the soul of the believer, his agency in producing the fruits of holiness should not be omitted. "Herein is my Father glorified," says our Lord, "that ye bear much fruit" (John xv. 9); adding the significant caution, "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me" (verse 4). This requires the progressive sanctification of the believer, developing a symmetrical character, and one adorned with all the spiritual graces. These are expressly defined as "the fruits of the Spirit." (Gal. v. 22, 23.) They are like the fruit of a tree hanging from the branches, which extend from every side, showing the vigor of life in the parent, trunk and branch alike. It is thus through the general invigoration of the spiritual life in the soul that a well-proportioned character is built up, bearing its constant but silent testimony to the exceeding riches of divine grace before a world lying in sin. This spiritual life our Lord compares to the sap in the vine, the actual blood of the plant, which is conducted through the stem into the branches, forming the ripe clusters of the luscious grapes, which yield the "wine that maketh glad the heart of man" (Ps. civ. 15). In all these different forms of the Spirit's action within the soul, the believer traces the manifold fellowship he may hold with this Person of the blessed Trinity.

4. *Three operations of the Spirit remain to be considered; not so much within the experience of the Christian as upon and confirmatory of it.* The first of these is the testimony which he bears to the reality of the believer's hope in Christ. The inspired apostle declares, "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God." (Rom. viii. 16.) The language is forensic, as relating to a case on trial before a court. The issue is to the soundness of a believer's title to eternal life. This must be determined by the concurring testimony of two witness—the believer's own consciousness on the one hand, and the testimony of the Holy Spirit on the other. The concurrence of the two is declared to be necessary: "The Spirit beareth witness *with* our spirit." The former must not only agree with the latter; but it must be delivered through it, as alone consistent with the subjective character of this agent's work throughout.

Let us take a concrete case for illustration. A Christian addresses himself in earnest to the work of self-examination, in order to know with certainty that he is a child of God. He finds much in his outer and inner life to bewail and confess before his righteous Judge: yet even in his seasons of darkness under the hiding of his Father's face, he cannot relax his hold upon the person and work of the Redeemer. He is obliged to testify that, if he knows anything with certainty on earth, it is that he relies upon Christ alone for salvation. Now this, according to the teaching of the scriptures,

ought to bring peace to his troubled heart; but it does not. The peace of God does not come to a single soul through a mere logical process. No man ever reasoned himself into a sense of reconciliation with God as a loving and gracious Father. The testimony of consciousness is indispensable as the basis of proof, but it must be confirmed by a different testimony from another party. This new evidence is furnished by the Holy Spirit when he brings peace to the soul which has been disturbed by doubt and fear. The believer knows from his own consciousness that he rests alone in the redemption of Christ for salvation, and the Spirit who wrought this faith in him now attests it by shedding abroad in his heart the "peace which passeth all understanding." (Phil. iv. 7.) Thus, through the entire range of Christian experience, the Holy Spirit attests it as genuine by the comfort, and peace, and joy with which it should be crowned.

The Scriptures speak also of the sealing of the Spirit. The use of the seal has been common in all ages and among all nations, and for a great variety of purposes. The most common of these is as a sign of possession, marking anything as one's own. Again, it is employed for the authentication of one person as the agent of another; as when a representative of one government bears the seal of his commission to another. Still again, its object is to ensure protection to those who may be dependent upon us for the same. These examples will suffice for the illustration of the few pas-

sages to be adduced now from the Scriptures. Our Lord says to the Jews: "Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed." (John vi. 27.) He evidently means that he, as the Son of man, has been authenticated as able to give this enduring meat through the stupendous miracle which had just been wrought before their eyes. Again: "Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, . . . hath also sealed us, and given us the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts." (2 Cor. ii. 21, 22.) Also, "In whom after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession." (Eph. i. 13, 14.) In these last two passages the meaning is plainly the same. The Spirit is regarded as the seal of God's right of property in the believer; and is an assurance of the divine protection even to the end. In like manner, and with like import, the same apostle exhorts the Christian, "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption." (Eph. iv. 30.) It will not be necessary to enlarge further upon this topic of the sealing of the Spirit; since this would be the repetition and expansion of all that has been written in the preceding section of this chapter. The same inward operations of the Holy Spirit are embraced in the term; only that in this they are presented as corroborative evidence of the believer's

acceptance with God, and is actually given for his eternal salvation.

In two of the preceding citations the earnest of the Spirit is connected with his sealing. Only a slight difference of meaning divides between the two. An earnest is simply a partial payment of anything, as a pledge of fidelity for the remainder. In this sense the possession of the Holy Spirit with all that he accomplishes in the human soul is an assurance to the believer that he is an heir of glory; and that he enjoys on earth a portion of that inheritance which shall be his in full possession hereafter. The same Divine Spirit, who on earth is the bond of our union with Christ, will dwell within us forever—the living tie which still unites us to our Head. The same divine life, which quickened us here below, will be the life which will quicken us above. The same divine power, which here expands all the faculties of the soul, will there before the throne enlarge them to drink in the fulness of God evermore. Thus the Spirit becomes to us, in very truth, the "earnest of our inheritance."

In this connection it would be a strange omission not to emphasize the Spirit's agency in the resurrection of the body. Whilst the resurrection of Christ is the ground and pledge of our own, the agent in its accomplishment is the Holy Spirit, through his office as the quickener. Paul testifies: "If the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your

mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you." (Rom. viii. 11.) The body is a part of us, no less than the soul. Both have fallen away from God under the dominion of sin. The curse of the law rests equally upon both, and both necessarily share in the grace of adoption. We shall be human beings in heaven as well as here — rendered such by the union of body and spirit—both equally glorified so as to be made meet for a glorified state. To the Spirit's care is committed the body of the saint, even in the grave. His head rests upon the pillow of the covenant; and the Holy Spirit lights the lamp of promise, which chases away the gloom of the sepulchre. He who is "the resurrection and the life" "will appear a second time, to be glorified in his saints and admired in them that believe."

"'Forever with the Lord,'
Amen! so let it be;
Life from the dead is in that word,
'Tis immortality."

PART II.

The Threefold Assurance.

The Threefold Assurance.

CHAPTER I.

THE ASSURANCE OF UNDERSTANDING.

"Unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the father, and of Christ."—COLOSSIANS ii. 2.

THE first part of this essay was employed in pointing out the followship of believers with each Person of the Godhead in their threefold office-work, by and through which the sinner's salvation is both accomplished and unfolded. The object of this second part will be the application of all this to the doctrine of Christian assurance in its threefold form: assurance of understanding, assurance of faith and assurance of hope. It is to the first of these the reader's attention will be directed in the present chapter.

Christianity is the only system depending on moral or probable evidence that proposes to bring its adherents to entire certainty of its contents. In rigid demonstration, as in mathematical reasoning, if the mind only holds together the successive steps, the conclusion is irresistible and exclusive of doubt. In moral reasoning, such as we are forced to employ in the affairs of life,

the evidence turns upon contingencies which are more or less capable of proof. We are compelled to put this against that, to sift and to weigh facts; and our conviction is strong or weak according to the amount of evidence which we accumulate in this scale or that. Now, it is wonderful that the gospel, proceeding on this line of proof, should undertake to produce the threefold assurance spoken of above; that is, to bring certainty on every point at which it touches the believer at all. This certainty is affirmed in the verse cited above, with a fourfold intensification of language. The apostle expresses his desire that the Colossians may have not only an understanding of the truth, but the assurance of that understanding; and beyond this, the fulness of that assurance; and then the riches of that fulness; and finally, the riches entire—the whole wealth of the fulness of the assurance of understanding. This is the more remarkable when you consider the variety of topics in the gospel, their transcendental character, and the opposition it encounters from man's corrupt nature.

This is far from being the only passage in Scripture which affirms the necessity of knowledge in order to faith. It may be well to accumulate testimony upon this point, as well as upon the certainty of the same, and upon the fact that both these come by direct communication from God through the Spirit. Our Lord himself declares, "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself." (John vii. 17.) "This is the life eternal,

that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." (John xvii. 3.) "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (John viii. 32.) In like manner the inspired apostles deliver their testimony. "God . . . hath shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." (2 Cor. iv. 6.) ". . . And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God." (Eph. iii. 19.) "The God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened." (Eph. i. 17, 18.) "We do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding." (Col. i. 9.) "Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord." (2 Peter i. 2.) "We know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true." (1 John v. 20.) In addition to the above, two other testimonies may be cited establishing the absolute certainty of this knowledge. "Hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments" (1 John ii. 3); also, "Hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him." (1 John iii. 19.)

Other testimonies will suffice to show that our assured knowledge of the truth does not come alone

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through the accuracy of our own logical processes, but through a direct unfolding of the same by the Holy Spirit. "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." (Matt. xvi. 17.) "The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." (John xiv. 26.) Still further, "When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: . . . for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you." (John xvi. 14.) "No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost." (1 Cor. xii. 3.) "In everything ye are enriched by him (Christ), in all utterance, and in all knowledge." (1 Cor. i. 5.)

What, then, do the Scriptures mean by this assurance of understanding, and how is it possible to exist? Not that reason is able to comprehend all the mysteries in the system of grace, but that we may be perfectly persuaded, or assured, that we have God's mind in the gospel—that it is the truth, and that we rightly understand it. It is not only that we know the truth of God, but we know that we know it. It remains, then, for us to see upon what grounds is such full assurance of understanding possible to the Christian.

1. *Divine truth is received by the believer upon the authority of a divine testimony.* The very purpose of the Scriptures is to disclose the mind of God in the

salvation of the sinner. There is no other way of knowing it except through a revelation distinctly guaranteed as coming from himself. We have this guarantee from the parties by whom this revelation is made. "He that loveth me not keepeth not my saying: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me. . . . The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." (John xiv. 24, 26.) Here is the explicit declaration that the whole content of the gospel comes to us through the combined testimony of all Persons of the Godhead. The separate agency of each has been sufficiently indicated in the preceding portion of this essay—that of the Son in working out the scheme of redemption, and that of the Spirit in securing an infallible record of the same. The Christian accepts both these as a perfect guarantee that in the holy Scriptures he has a divine testimony upon which to ground his own acceptance of the same. It is scarcely necessary to remind the reader that this little book is not intended to be an apologetic defence of the Bible against the attacks of the infidel or the skeptic. It is written for the believer alone who accepts the Bible as coming from God; only to show the guarantees upon which he receives the testimony which it delivers. If we are ever to know why the grace revealed in the gospel is a sufficient basis upon which to rest our hope of salvation, it is on the testimony of those who have wrought

out the scheme, and who must be allowed to know what they meant in it all.

Should it be urged that the method of salvation disclosed is too full of mysteries to be accredited by the reason, the reply is that they can be received by faith. It will hardly be questioned that the latter is as truly a part of our mental constitution as the former. The child believes instinctively all that it is told, until by later experience it learns the prevalency of falsehood as well as truth. This, however, does not invalidate the fact that we naturally accept testimony as the ground of belief. Nay, as against the rationalist in this matter, it can be shown that all reasoning starts from some postulate of faith, and has its conclusion confirmed by a final act of faith. In the science of mathematics, where the demonstration is most rigid, the first link of the chain hangs upon an axiom which is a pure act of faith; and the conclusion is rendered certain by a similar confidence in our own mental powers, which have conducted the whole course of reasoning. It will be a most ungrateful return, therefore, if, depending first and last upon faith for its authentication, reason should impeach its authority as a basis of any of our convictions.

But more than this: these mysteries themselves are in evidence of the truth of the record. What is God but a mystery? Nay, the first of all the mysteries is his eternal self-existence, his omnipresence, in the very mode of his subsistence, as has been already shown. Will reason undertake to say that there is no God

because it cannot understand him? What, then, will it do with matter, in which science is disclosing a thousand mysteries—unable to tell even what it is? What will it do with mind, which philosophy has been struggling to explain since men first began to think? If there be no God, how came anything else to be? Mystery, therefore, belongs to the sphere in which God moves; and if there were no mysteries in revelation, it could never claim to come from God. In fact, all the mysteries in the scheme of grace attest it to be the work of an Infinite Being, and thus form a substantive proof of the truth which reveals it in the sacred Scriptures. Just in this is found the supreme value of a divine testimony, in that it places all truth upon precisely the same level. The inexplicable, as well as the simple and plain, are received with the same ease by the same faith. Nothing in Scripture is to be received upon the ground that it is understood, but upon the ground that it has been revealed. All resting upon divine testimony are to be received as of equal authority.

2. *There are fundamental instincts in the very structure of our nature, to which the gospel can appeal, and by which its truths can be recognized and received.* Reference is not here made to those original and substantive faculties of the soul necessary to man as a responsible agent. Since the fall these are fearfully debased by sin. The mind has been darkened, the conscience debauched, the affections estranged, and the will enslaved. Still they exist. Through these our salvation

is wrought and in the glorified use of them heaven itself is enjoyed. If man was in the beginning created in the image of God, he must have been endowed with spiritual instincts which should respond to any communication made to him. And should a permanent revelation be afforded, this must find points of attachment to which it shall immediately adhere. It does not require a long search to discover these.

The first to be mentioned is the readiness with which the idea of a God is received, and the tenacity with which it is held. Incomprehensible as the conception is in itself, it is firmly lodged in the mind of the race, and can never be eradicated. It is very curious to hear an atheist declare, "There is no God," when the very word itself proves that he has the concept of such a being; and just to that extent God exists to him. Let him say or do what he will, there is no dislodgment of the idea from his own consciousness. He may write a volume to refute the fact; but the more frequently the name is used, or the thought entertained, so much the deeper is the eternal truth chiselled upon his mind, which is compelled to retain the conception. God is simply a necessity of thought; for we cannot think in any direction without postulating the divine existence. Have we, for example, the notion of cause? Then we must run along the chain of cause and effect until we find the first cause to which it must be fastened. That first cause is God. We speak freely about the finite. But how can the finite be defined except by contrast with

the infinite, its opposite pole? But the Infinite is God. We talk of the relative in contrast with the absolute. But the Absolute is God. Every term which is employed in science and philosophy in setting forth their conclusions has, at the other end of the line, only God. Surely if the Almighty has ever disclosed and maintained his supremacy, it is in the fact that no creature can even think without the implication of his being and rule.

Let us look at this from a different point of view. Through the entire range of human history, and under all the changing conditions of the race, this recognition of God has never been erased. If ever there was a universal idea ruling the minds of men, it is the existence of an infinite and supreme Being, who holds and controls the universe. No people has yet been discovered so sunk in brutish ignorance as not to possess a correspondingly rude and degrading conception of the deity. If, however, in the judgment of travellers any such have been discovered, it has been testified that they are sunk in such depths of degradation as scarcely to be distinguished from wild animals of the forest. All this goes to show that the sparks of living fire are there, though covered in the ashes beneath which they are buried.

If almost brutish ignorance does not extinguish the recognition of God, neither has the universal spread of idolatry over the earth. Indeed, it is wonderful how, in his overruling power, he has made this idolatry a means

of proclaiming his existence and his just demand upon the worship of mankind. It so recognizes the need of a God that it searches through all nature for suitable objects to represent him and bring him near to the worshiper. It so asserts a controlling providence, that it appoints a separate deity for the mountain and the stream, for the forest and the lake, for the land and the sea, that protection and guidance may be at hand everywhere upon the globe. Nay, in its corruption of the truth, which still it proclaims, idolatry teaches the doctrine of sin in its fastings and penances and pilgrimages. In its altars, reeking with the blood and smoking with the fires of numerous sacrifices, it offers a sad travesty of that atonement for sin which is revealed in the gospel. Evidently, in the whole history of idolatry God has imposed a check upon human departure from himself, that it may not reach the height of wickedness as before the flood. Even in its hideous caricature of the truth, and in its utter corruption of all worship of himself, he has strangely compelled idolatry to make confession of him and of his grace through all the ages.

This imperishable recognition of the existence and authority of the Divine Being is the source of endless comfort and joy to the sincere Christian. To such an one he is a God nigh at hand, a very present help in time of trouble. But it is a truth for the unconverted to ponder. It is not possible for God to create a being in his own image, placing him under the control of law, and to allow the transgressor the slightest chance of

escape from his presence and power. Such a soul will not be able even to think in eternity without feeling the pressure of the divine presence.

A second element in our nature to which the gospel directly appeals is the firm persuasion of God's conversableness with his creatures. The difficulties here are not slight to human reason. On the human side lies the fact that our souls are locked up in these bodies of flesh, and are dependent upon the organs of sense for communication with all that is external. On the divine side is a twofold embarrassment: that arising from the entire spirituality of his essence, and that from the infinite perfection of his attributes. The first of these deepens in significance when it is recalled that we are strictly forbidden to form any image of him, even in our mental conception. The second enlarges when we stretch our thought to the infinitude of each single perfection, and seek to gather them into a cluster brilliant with a glory worthy of the great Being to whom they belong. Yet underlying these obstacles is the inwrought conviction that the Divine Being may be approached, and that sensible intercourse with him can be maintained. This lays the foundation upon which rests the possibility of both a revelation and an incarnation. The common sense of mankind in all ages has accepted both as true, and every form of religion has been built upon both. Great as the mystery may be in either, the fact itself has been accepted as the necessary condition of all true knowledge, and of all rational worship of God.

The silent prayer in the closet and the combined praises in the sanctuary rest alike upon the supreme conviction of God's conversableness with his creatures.

A still sweeter proof of this remains to be considered. When conscience, challenged by the law, arraigns the sinner before the bar of infinite Justice, what shall keep him from sinking in despair under a sense of accumulated guilt? Nothing but an ineradicable persuasion of the divine mercy blending with justice in the administration of law. The ground of reconciliation between these may be only dimly perceived at all. But there would seem to be a blind instinct in man feeling after God, even in the dark. In Grecian fable, when all the gifts of the deity had fled, hope alone remained in Pandora's box. But in the case we have supposed, this hope can hang only upon some principle in the divine economy in which an accusing conscience may take refuge. When, therefore, the Scriptures come to the awakened sinner with the doctrine of atonement and pardon, hope finds the basis laid upon which its faint expectation may be fulfilled. Two considerations support this view. Among the essential attributes of God no one of them can overtop or overlap another; and we should antecedently expect an equal display of them in any revelation made to the creature. In addition to this, the dispensation of God towards the human race is distinctly intended to disclose to the universe this particular attribute of mercy—thus revealing his infinite love, which underlies and prompts all his acts to his

intelligent creatures. This element, therefore, in our nature is that to which the gospel immediately appeals, and finds its entrance even into the bosom of despair with the offer of salvation.

3. *The most difficult truths of the Bible are taken into the experience of the Christian, and are thus verified to him.* In conviction of sin, for example, the basis is laid for the recognition of the whole doctrine of redemption. This word implies that the sinner cannot be discharged from condemnation until a substitute shall suffer the penalty in his stead. That substitute, as we have before seen, cannot be found among beings who are themselves under law. He must be sought in the pavilion of the Godhead, and this draws after it the mystery of the Trinity. Then this divine substitute must also be human in order to redeem man; and this necessitates the incarnation, or "God manifest in the flesh." Then follows the covenant of grace between the Persons of the Godhead, and the offices to be discharged by each in executing its provisions. To all this must be added a vicarious atonement, with its attendant mystery of a justifying righteousness, and its imputation to the sinner that it may become in law his own. What a cluster of scriptural doctrines here presented, interdependent and interlaced—a perfect solar system of truth, as marvellous in their orderly arrangement as the movements of the planets in their orbit.

There is still another constellation shining in the firmament of divine revelation. In the experience of

pardon, the entire mystery of the new birth in its practical import is unveiled. The impartation of spiritual life is the necessary antecedent to both repentance and faith. It has been already shown that spiritual life, like natural life, must precede movement and action. There can be no turning from sin, with grief and hatred, until its true nature has been seen in the light of God's infinite holiness, to which it is opposed. Now, until the principle of holiness has been again implanted in the human soul, it has no proper conception of sin as being entire estrangement from God, its primal, and indeed its only, source. Equally so with faith as the coördinate of repentance. Christ must be seen in order to be embraced; and to this end the eye of the blind must be opened; and if the eye be sealed in the blindness of death, life must be restored in order to sight. When, therefore, the sinner has through regeneration entered into spiritual life, the whole process of sanctification is begun in the long struggle with indwelling sin, and continues until the final translation to heaven.

Again: in the use of prayer we learn the whole secret of intercourse with God; mysterious, in that it is maintained in the silence of thought, and most intimate when without the intervention of words or symbols of any kind. The omniscient Father listens to the breathing of every emotion, hears the whisper of every sigh, and feels the pulse of every thought. There can be no communion so close with any creature. God is able to

interpret that which is concealed in the depths of our consciousness. Our intercourse with him is the more confidential, in that he will keep to himself the darkest secrets which we entrust to him. The heaviest sorrows, which no word is strong enough to bear, he can measure by the grace which it is his purpose to impart. Despite, therefore, all the mystery which involves such correspondence between earth and heaven, the believer knows the sweetness and the joy which hourly come from it to his own soul.

Still further, in the hope which sustains him, he gathers up all that relates to death, the resurrection and the life to come; and, with all the mysteries which intervene, he bridges the chasm between time and eternity. All Christian truth is brought within the range of human sympathy and is tested by experience. Thus he swings around the entire circle of Christian doctrine; finding in that experience the key fitting into the wards of every lock and opening the meaning of each one in its turn.

4. *The final ground upon which rests this assurance of understanding is the direct influence of the Holy Ghost in illuminating the truth which he has inspired.* The former would seem to follow the latter by logical sequence—certainly it follows by the logic of grace. It is the province of this agent to embody the truth in such form that he may employ it as an instrument in the salvation of men. Food may be provided for the body, but the reception and digestion of it are necessary if life

is to be sustained. So truth may be spread in abundance upon the pages of the Bible, but it is only the appropriation of it to the wants of the soul that can make the babe in Christ grow up to the stature of a perfect man in him. This, then, is made the office of the Holy Spirit in the scheme of grace.

In the preceding portion of this essay this was shown to be done in the twofold and reciprocal way, through the illumination of the word and the illumination of the mind to receive it. They may both be explained through a single illustration. The reader has doubtless seen business houses in a city with the name of the firm indicated in large letters made up of small points, obscure and unimpressive in broad daylight: but when the ignited gas streams through these the name comes out in letters of living fire. So the words of the Bible lie cold and dull upon the printed page, until a sudden flash of light gleams through the text, disclosing a wealth of meaning never seen before. Not a single sincere and earnest Christian but has found this to be often true in his own experience. Truths new and exceedingly precious are continually breaking in upon the mind from passages of Scripture, forming often distinct stages in the Christian experience, by which we mark our progress towards the goal.

Recurring to the illustration employed above, in the midst of that illumination which has been described, there might wander around some one unfortunately blind. To him the brilliant light would reveal nothing;

and a new power must be invoked restoring sight before the strange wonder could be perceived. Thus the Holy Spirit must open the eyes of the spiritually blind before the illuminated word can impart a single beam of spiritual truth. It is in this subjective influence upon the mind itself of the believer that we can more distinctly trace the agency of the Holy Spirit. All progress in knowledge depends upon the mental preparation to receive the truth disclosed. This is preëminently true in the reception of spiritual truth; for "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: . . . neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." (1 Cor. ii. 14.) The Spirit, for example, removes the prejudice and misapprehensions which so often becloud the mind of a true believer. Then there is a sensible quickening of the mental perception of truth hitherto concealed. In addition, there is an enlargement of Christian experience, sometimes sudden, but often gradual, preparing it for the disclosures yet to be made. "I have yet many things to say unto you," said our Lord to his disciples, "but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth." (John xvi. 12, 13.) Still further, there is given consciously to the Christian the power of appropriating the truth when it is revealed, in its nature and effect analogous to that act of faith in which he first received and appropriated Christ as his personal Saviour. The truth, like food, is thus assimilated so as to enter into the bone and muscle,

rendering the man of God valiant and strong in every emergency of the Christian life. Last of all in these progressive experiences there is the direct sealing of the truth upon the conscience and heart of the believer; and through this demonstration of the Spirit the truth receives its final attestation. In all this blessed agency, which has been so briefly sketched, all God's children stand upon an equal footing. However they may differ in general scholarship or in mental acumen, they are alike under the guidance of the Spirit of God. Our Lord himself testifies that it is through the truth, in the knowledge and application of it, that the sanctification of the believer is accomplished. In his prayer addressed to the Father, he offers this petition for his disciples: "Sanctify them through thy truth, thy word is truth." (John xvii. 17.) The inspired apostle also describes those who are in Christ as "being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever." (1 Peter i. 23.) Thus it happens that many a humble disciple, with only the Scriptures in his hand, may have a truer knowledge of God and of his will than all the generations of men who are skilled alone in the wisdom of this world. This, too, is in accordance with the promise of the Saviour: "It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God." (John vi. 45.)

Gathering up all that has been written in this chapter, the believer's assured knowledge may be considered to rest upon these four pillars: a divine testimony given

in an inspired record, the instincts planted in man's nature as the sockets in which the gospel may find its first lodgment, the verification of the truth in Christian experience, and the continuous agency of the Holy Spirit in disclosing and applying the truth. It should be recognized, however, that all this does not infer the Christian's infallibility in the interpretation of Scripture. There is room for variation of opinion in construing the naked text itself, especially as first given in a foreign dialect. There are also the prepossessions of early education, giving an unsuspected bias which may warp the judgment. In addition to these external dangers and others which might be mentioned, there is the transcendental character of the truths themselves—involving mysteries utterly beyond finite comprehension, except as ultimate facts received upon testimony alone. Allied, too, as these truths must be in forming a complete system, they are not equally essential to the salvation of the soul. Often recondite and regarded by some as mere abstractions, their pretermission may impair the symmetry of Christian character without invalidating the hope of a saving interest in Christ. There may be truths necessary to the integrity of the system of grace which yet may not be essential to the salvation of the soul.

The assurance of understanding which the Scriptures hold out to the believer to seek and to obtain is a grace of the Spirit, and it relates to all that one must know in order to be a child of God. These lie at the

foundation of Christian hope and experience. They are truths which all true Christians unite in receiving and in confessing before the world. It is in this inward acceptance of, and building upon, the scheme of grace that we find the absolute unity of the true church of God on earth and in heaven. With all the wrangling upon topics that lie in the outer circles of revealed truth, there is but one Lord, one faith and one baptism (of the Spirit) with all those who are the children of God. All such in every age know the truth with greater or less assurance of understanding, according as they have been taught by the Spirit in their advancing experience. Perhaps if all Christians would depend less upon their own processes of logic, and more upon the demonstration of the Spirit, they would comprehend still better "what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and know the love of God, which passeth knowledge." (Eph. iii. 18, 19.)

It is doubly sad that any Christian should be content to rest in vague and uncertain notions about the scheme of grace, both because it is unnecessary and because it leaves the soul in a state of perplexity and doubt as to its true relations to God. If there is a way to be saved, we ought to know and to understand its provisions. One must first know whether reconciliation with God is possible in order to avail himself of it, and then he must know the terms upon which it is offered before he can accept them. Thus while the assurance of understanding is not salvation in itself, it is the path which

opens to it. But thrice blessed are they who can say, "We know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding that we may know him that is true; and we are in him that is true, even in his Son, Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life." (1 John v. 20.)

CHAPTER II.

THE ASSURANCE OF FAITH.

"Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith."—HEBREWS x. 22.

THE subject of the preceding chapter was "the full assurance of understanding," as the full conviction that we have a clear spiritual perception of the meaning of holy Scripture; not comprehending, of course, its mysteries, but understanding them as facts distinctly revealed. The topic now to be discussed is the full assurance of faith, which may be defined as the full unswerving conviction of the reality and truth of all that the Scriptures reveal, embracing it with entire acquiescence and satisfaction of soul, and acting upon it as each particular truth may require. The statement is made thus general to cover every form of truth and every corresponding phase of the faith—in obeying commands, trembling under divine threatenings, embracing the promises. This is a step taken in advance of the preceding; that insisted upon assured perception of the meaning of Scripture; this, upon the hearty reception and embrace of what is there revealed.

It is well to clear up a misunderstanding of terms at the outset. The assurance of faith, properly understood, is not the assurance of our personal salvation,

which is rather the assurance of hope. The two are easily confounded, partly because they are not always distinguished by those who treat of these topics; partly because the assurance of faith enters as an element into that of hope; and partly because the word assurance, when used alone, is generally interpreted as being the certainty of being in a state of grace.

The following testimonies will show the scriptural warrant for this truth: "Without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him." (Heb. xi. 6.) "Let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed." (James i. 6.) "I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting." (1 Tim. ii. 8.) "Our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance." (1 Thes. i. 5.) With our definition of the term before us, let us see upon what grounds this assurance of faith may be affirmed.

1. *The exercise of faith is involved in the fact of probation itself, both of law and of grace.* Man, created in righteousness and holiness, was placed under law for the trial of his integrity. He must decide once for all whether obedience to the divine will shall be the regulative principle of his life. The test employed for this purpose was a single act, easy of performance; an act, too, which had in itself no moral significance, that it

might turn alone upon the divine will. There was no more sin in eating the fruit of one tree in the garden than in eating of any other tree. The sin consisted simply in disobeying God's express command. Whether we apply to this transaction the word covenant or not, there was a distinct alternative presented to our first parent. A plain command was laid upon him. Upon his compliance with this, certain privileges would be conferred; to disobedience certain penalties were annexed. What guarantee, now, did Adam have for all this? Nothing beyond the simple word of his Maker. Upon belief or disbelief of this his destiny must turn. This becomes plain from the next step in the history. The tempter appears upon the scene with a counter declaration, "Ye shall not die: for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." (Gen. iii. 4, 5.) Here, then, are two opposing testimonies; which shall the man believe? The narrative goes on to say, "And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat." (Gen. iii. 6.) From that moment the fate of the transgressor was sealed and his probation under law ceased. The whole matter plainly turned upon his refusal to believe the declaration of Jehovah, which had been made to him in the most explicit language.

It has pleased God, however, to reveal a dispensation of mercy. His infinite wisdom has devised and his infinite power has executed a scheme of grace, upon which a free and full offer of salvation is made to every sinner who will accept the terms. When, therefore, any of our unhappy race is brought to a sense of his guilt and desires reconciliation with God, what is the first thing to be done? What, in fact, do we find is done on the part of God at this particular juncture—the critical moment, as we may suppose, in which the creature's destiny is to be determined? We may conceive it as though God actually brought the sinner to the foot of the tree of knowledge of good and evil and addressed him thus: "Just here sin began on earth through man's refusal to believe my word. At the very spot where this great wrong was committed, I require you to retract the same. Your first father fell through unbelief. You can only be saved through a clear and abiding faith in the offer of salvation which I make to you." Does not the logic of the situation require this? Does not the honor of his name demand that the foul blot cast upon his integrity in the fall shall be repaired in the redemption from the fall? Even amongst men, the last insult which can be endured is to have one's veracity impugned. Yet in all generations this insult has been renewed in man's disregard of God's testimony in the Scriptures concerning sin. Does not the reader's sense of justice acquiesce in the decision that God must require faith in his word in order to salvation?

There is, however, a view of wider sweep than this. We are placed by the Creator in a world which can be known only through the five senses of the body. These not only convey impressions from the outer world, but verify and seal it as objective and real: as when, against all the whimsies of the idealist, the sight of a tree is accompanied with an irrepressible conviction that it has a substantive existence of its own. Hence Isaac Taylor calls the body an organ of the soul, and the senses open gateways by which the soul goes forth and takes possession of a world foreign to itself. Now, if God gives us five senses to recognize the world of matter, shall he give us no faculty by which to discover that of spirit? There are pauses in life when the soul is locked up within itself to learn that it belongs to a world that is akin to its own nature. God is a spirit, and all the revelations of his purposes and of his being lift us above sense into a sphere that is spiritual. As this can be known to us only through testimony, this demands the existence of faith as an essential element of our nature. It will not be necessary to enlarge upon this, as in the preceding chapter faith has been shown to be the primary basis upon which all our mental and moral processes must rest. This carries with it the conclusion that in every dispensation of God towards man, faith in his word must enter as a necessary element and condition.

2. *The truths of religion are disclosed to faith, so as to become the foundation of duty and of worship.* The argument presented above is one simply of analogy;

that if we possess external organs by which to recognize and explore the material world, there should be some internal sense through which we may communicate with the world that is spiritual. By what name shall this faculty or power be designated? Shall it be the faculty of reason? Let us suppose a revelation to be given, making known the facts of God's existence and of the relation in which he stands to us as law-giver and ruler; can reason explain or expound these to us? Has she even the language in which to do it? What can she do more than simply to hand back to us the facts themselves just as she herself received them? Take, for example, the least challenged of the divine attributes, omniscience and omnipresence. Can reason tell us the method by which God comes to his knowledge? Does he learn by experience, or through any course of inductive reasoning? Does he feel his way, as we do, step by step along a chain of premises to a distant conclusion? In the beautiful language of Charnock, "God sees all things that may be in the glass of his power, and all things that shall be in the glass of his will." But who can explain this mysterious consciousness that can hold in its eternal grasp the innumerable contingencies that make up the history of the universe? Equally so with the omnipresence of God. What explanation does reason give of this attribute? What is the manner of God's presence anywhere? Is it by change of place, or is it by diffusion through space? These impertinent questions serve at least to show that we can enter into no explanation of

the divine perfections without materializing him, and thus cancelling the fundamental conception of him as pure spirit.

What we need is not the power to understand, but the power to feel and to embrace. It is not the explanation of that which is shrouded in mystery that we need; but it is certitude of the truth in its reality and its actual appropriation to practical ends. The truth must not only be known, but it must be recognized in its transforming and controlling influence over the character and life. What is needed is the power of spiritual digestion, analogous to that of the body, by which the truth received shall be distributed to all the constituent faculties of the soul, and be duly assimilated to each. This spiritual apprehension and appropriation of revealed truth is what we understand by the word faith, as will appear by recurrence to the definition given of it at the opening of this chapter—that it is the full unswerving conviction of the reality and truth of all that the Scriptures reveal, embracing it with entire acquiescence and satisfaction of soul. Let us test this in a concrete case. It is said above that religious truth is the foundation of duty and worship. Every act should therefore be performed under a sense of the divine presence and authority. Is this true of unconverted men? Even the most moral and upright either perform their various duties mechanically through obedience to custom or from worldly considerations approved by their judgment. God is not present to their

thought, and their course of life cannot be described as a life of obedience to his will. In order to this there must be the power to feel habitually the presence of God and to act under its controlling influence. So, too, with reference to worship. How can we pray to a God who is afar off? Is not this the difficulty with the believer himself in his seasons of spiritual darkness? He tries to pray, but his words are spoken into the air, and not into the ear of a confiding friend. There is a feeling of estrangement from God in place of that sweet communion which he had been accustomed to enjoy. An habitual sense of the divine presence is required in order to obedience and worship alike; and the conscious realization of this is embraced in the word faith.

If, now, these truths are to be verified as certain, rather than conjectural, do the Scriptures support us in assigning this function to faith? We have what may be termed a definition of faith in these words, "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." (Heb. xi. 1.) Here is distinctly affirmed the actualizing power of true faith, through which abstract propositions floating in the air become the convictions which rule the conscience and the heart. It is, says the apostle, "the substance of things hoped for"—giving body and form to what otherwise would remain shadowy and dim. Now hope, as we shall see in the following chapter, is the union of expectation and desire for things which are not in actual possession. They must, however, be real to us in order to be desired,

and the conviction of this reality is produced through faith, which is the actualization of what is future. So, again, it is "the evidence of things not seen." By a profoundly spiritual apprehension of them through the testimony of God, there is an actual seizure of them in their felt reality. This is not the place in which to explain the agency by which this secret power is wrought in the soul. At present we are only concerned with the fact itself, which is the conviction of reality produced through the divinely implanted principle of faith which tests and verifies it all.

3. *The appropriating power of faith is conspicuously seen in the sinner's acceptance of Christ as a personal Saviour.* The work of redemption, as shown in the preceding chapter, gathers around it a cluster of doctrines, each requiring to be received as an integer of the whole. It is not necessary to insist further upon the certifying of these in order to their acceptance. For the exact pivot of the sinner's salvation is the personal interest he has in the redemption itself. The very structure of the scheme requires that he shall be integrated with Christ, so as to be one with him in the eye of the law. Let this point be put beyond dispute. In the scheme of grace God has appointed his incarnate Son to be the only mediator between the sinner and himself. All the conditions being fulfilled necessary to meet the claims of justice and holiness, "God now is in Christ reconciling the world unto himself," offering complete salvation to all who will meet him in Christ. He can recog-

nize the sinner nowhere else than in the Mediator, by whom all the claims of law have been satisfied. On the other hand, to whom can the sinner go, but to him who has borne for him the penalty, and has provided the only righteousness in which he can be just before God? Only to him can he repair in whom the spiritual life is stored which he has redeemed; and in whom, as his sponsor, lies the only hope of final blessedness before the presence of the throne in the world of glory. The very nature of the scheme requires that the estranged parties shall meet for perfect reconciliation only in him by whom the salvation has been wrought; and that, being in him, they never afterward can be disjoined.

What a mighty coalition is this between the infinite God and the redeemed sinner; and how wonderful the nature of the tie by which they both are united to the Mediator! On the part of Jehovah this connection is through a veritable incarnation on the one hand, and by covenant stipulation on the other. In the case of the saved sinner it is through a spiritual birth on the one hand, and through a divinely inspired faith on the other. Under what mysterious agencies are the two parties brought together, who were before separated as far as death is from life! All this goes very far in accentuating the nature and power of this principle of faith, by which eternal life is secured to a soul before lost in sin and exposed to the second death. It is such a power as can spring only from life—and a life divinely infused, as the bond of union never to be broken while

eternity endures. Such is the nature and office of that faith which, springing from the life infused by the Spirit, lays hold upon the life secured by the Son, and lifts the believer at length to the glory which it enjoys with the Father forever above.

There is another view under which the office of faith should be emphasized. It is that in the appropriating act of faith, the agency and responsibility of man as a being under law is most fully recognized. Ever since the days of Paul it has been reiterated against the gospel that it discharges man from all legal responsibility in grounding the sinner's justification before God upon the righteousness of another rather than his own. This accusation the Apostle refutes, showing it to be a contradiction in terms: "Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" (Rom. vi. 1, 2.) For "as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (vs. 4). This long-standing reproach against the gospel finds its complete refutation in the very act of faith upon which it is founded. In the acceptance of Christ's righteousness instead of his own, the believer acknowledges that subjection to the law of God from which no creature can be exempt. If the sinner is to be saved by his own righteousness, his doom is forever sealed. The righteousness which the law originally required and must ever demand of the creature is perfect obedience to the divine will—an obedience uninter-

rupted and without a flaw from first to last. No sinner has such a righteousness before God; and, if saved at all, it must be through a righteousness not inherent, but imputed. When, therefore, in the scheme of grace a substitute renders such a perfect righteousness on the sinner's behalf, the acceptance of it by him is a distinct recognition of the law's original and proper demand. It is, moreover, not only a recognition, but also a clear fulfilment of the obligation imposed. Through the same act of the will which would have been required in working out a righteousness, he has accepted and made his own the obedience and righteousness of another. Thus his own sense of personal responsibility is fully met, and the duty which it required is completely discharged. In all this we have the direct testimony of holy Scripture. Thus the apostle testifies against his own people, the Jews: "They, being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." (Rom. x. 3, 4.) Still more largely he says, in another place: "Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus." (See Rom. iii. 24–26.)

Not only so, but this same law which demanded a perfect fulfilment is continued in its original force; and is being still obeyed in the presentation by the believer of the imputed righteousness of his Lord and Head. It is not, indeed, now the ground of his justification; but it is a free obedience of the law of grace, as it is the law of God in Christ. In all this appropriation of Christ and of his righteousness, the reality and sufficiency of the atonement for sin must be rendered antecedently certain to the believer; and thus the actualizing power of faith is disclosed at every stage in the whole process of justification.

4. *This actualizing power of faith comes alone through the agency of the Holy Spirit.* It has been impossible to avoid anticipating this in what has been already written. But the topic is of such supreme importance that it demands a separate consideration. It is the special function of the Spirit to apply the redemption which Christ has accomplished. Hence the subordination in office between the two, to which our Lord refers: "If I go not away, the Comforter will not come to you; but if I depart I will send him unto you." (John xvi. 7.) Again he says: "I will pray the Father, and he will send the Comforter, that he may abide with you forever." (John xiv. 16.) This marks the Spirit's office as the permanent indwelling agent, who shall carry forward in the soul of the believer the work of grace till it is complete in glory. For, says the Redeemer, "He shall glorify me; for he shall receive of mine and

shall show it unto you." (John xvi. 14.) In the first part of this essay, when dwelling upon fellowship with the Spirit, he was described as the secret and mighty power of God in the human soul—dealing with it as spirit only can deal with spirit. As freely as the wind moves through the most complex machinery, so he moves through all the faculties of man's soul, and as little impinging upon their freedom of action. Yet with all this, he infuses a silent influence which causes each power to move in the direction of his controlling will. This amazing mystery, uniting freedom and control in every act, finds its solution in a new life which the Holy Spirit breathes into the soul of man. The principle of holiness breaks the power of reigning sin and directs anew the faculties of the soul. The mind perceives truth under the new light which is shed upon it; the conscience renders its judgments under a new code which it accepts; the heart turns to a new love which attracts it; and the will, polarized afresh, impels in another course than before. The man is free in all his acts, which obey simply the law of a new nature begotten within him. It is this prevailing spiritual life, implanted and constantly invigorated by the indwelling Spirit of God, which actuates the faith and gives it both the certifying and the appropriating power heretofore described. If we do not know how all this is done, it is because we do not know how life acts upon and through all the organs which it is expected to control. But we know at least this, that the Spirit uses the truth

as his only instrument in all his operations within the believer. It is through this he informs the understanding, directs the conscience, sways the affections and controls the will. In the whole process of conversion and sanctification he deals with man as a moral and responsible being. This view will be strengthened if we emphasize the fact that the Spirit's agency is felt alike through all the powers of the human soul. If it were confined to one of these alone, error might creep in through some other faculty and vitiate the whole. But with an influence pervading alike all the faculties in man, the aberration which might occur in one would be corrected by the truth in another. Through the interaction of all these, we have the same kind of verification which we enjoy in science when engaged in exploring the hidden operations of nature. In the Spirit's work we have the additional security that his entire agency is brought within the range of our conscious experience—doubly certifying to us our convictions of truth as found in the gospel of Christ.

There are degrees in faith which do not rise to this complete assurance. Many causes contribute to this. There are timid souls, always distrustful of themselves and suspicious of danger, who instinctively draw back from a firm grasp of the promises. There are also desponding persons who, by constitutional temperament, live always in gloom and darkness of spirit. Both these classes are from the outset called to struggle with the difficulties of a natural disposition. Again, there are

others, emancipated from these troubles, who are suddenly plunged into heavy trials and sorrows in the administration of God's general providence. Overwhelmed by the suddenness of the shock, they waver for a time in that constancy of faith which they ordinarily preserve. Others, under the discipline of grace, are buffeted by the assaults of the adversary; and in the confusion of the conflict lose sight of the promise of being kept by the power of God unto final salvation (1 Peter i. 5). More sadly than all these supposed cases, many Christians become overtaken by a worldly spirit that their piety becomes chilled; and thus they grieve away from them that blessed Spirit who is the source of all their comfort and strength. Nevertheless, it is the privilege of all God's children to enjoy a complete assurance of faith. By this, let it be understood, is meant not that we are assured of our personal salvation; but only that there is an unswerving conviction of the truth of all that God reveals in his word, whether we can immediately apply it to our comfort or not. Indeed, our faith may be the most pleasing to our Heavenly Father when, without sensible comfort, there is nothing but this faith to which we can cling. In order to assurance, it is important that we should so continue in the exercise of the principle of faith that these single acts shall crystallize into the permanent and controlling habit of the soul. A weak faith is that which is vacillating and inconstant; a strong faith is that which abides in the assurance of God's truth.

CHAPTER III.

THE ASSURANCE OF HOPE.

"Show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope to the end."—HEBREWS vi. 11.

THE attention of the reader is now called to the last subject under discussion in this essay, the assurance of hope. It may be well, therefore, to present anew the distinction between the three kinds of assurance. The assurance of understanding has been defined as the clear and comforting persuasion that we rightly interpret the principles of grace as revealed in the gospel. That of faith is a full conviction of the reality and truth of this grace, whereby we rest upon it with entire confidence. That of hope is the fixed and well-grounded persuasion that we, as individuals, are accepted in Christ and shall never come into condemnation, but will inherit eternal life. We grapple, then, at the outset with the proposition itself, and ask on what grounds such an assurance can be shown to be attainable on earth.

1. *Hope is undoubtedly an elementary principle in our rational nature.* It may be compared with the instinct of animal life, which we share in common with the brute creation. We daily observe persons under great and continuous suffering, who in the midst of it

all cling tenaciously to life. It is undoubtedly a wise provision; for without it men under temporary distress would rush uncalled into their Maker's presence, and suicide would become a frequent crime. We may analogically describe hope as a rational instinct planted in our mental and moral constitution for equally wise ends. We are able to endure heavy disappointments and trials under the hope that a change will take place for the better, even when no rational ground for that hope appears. It is, to use a common phrase, hoping against hope. Yet it is sufficient to prevent rashness in the day of evil, and to keep us afloat in the wreck of earthly fortunes.

If this exposition be correct, why should not this hope be more conspicuously exercised in the sphere of religion than in matters that are earthly? The Christian believes that nothing happens in his lot by chance or accident. He is persuaded that God in his general providence orders all the affairs of men. But immeasurably beyond this he believes that, under a gracious covenant, these earthly trials are but a fatherly discipline preparing him for an inheritance of glory in the world to come. Hope has thus a wide sweep through all the promises of the gospel, bearing him up and carrying him through a sea of troubles which shall have their recompense hereafter. In this principle of hope we have a natural basis upon which we may rest the believer's comforting assurance of his personal salvation.

2. *If salvation depends upon our coming to Christ,*

the evidence of our acceptance of him would seem to be necessary. This brings up anew the appropriating power of faith, which was fully discussed in the preceding chapter. The believer may have the testimony of his own consciousness that, in obedience to the call of the gospel, he expects to be saved only through Christ Jesus as his Redeemer, and thus far he accepts him. But this brings him no immediate comfort until he has the evidence of his own acceptance before God. This is furnished only when a sense of pardon is sealed upon his conscience by the Holy Spirit. What is this, but to affirm what is equally true of the Christian in all the stages of his experience? There are, alas! only too many seasons of spiritual darkness, when the child of God is without any present sense of his Father's love. There remains still the principle of faith, which holds to Christ as the only possible Saviour, but the comfort of present acceptance with God is withheld. The exemplification of this distinction is found in the discipline of our earthly homes. A parent does not cease to love his child, even though the manifestation of that love may be withdrawn. Nor does the child lose confidence in the parent's protection and care, though now sore in heart under that parent's displeasure. So the Christian does not lose his confidence in God's love to him as his child, but has no comfort whilst debarred the joy of filial intercourse. This will suffice to prove what is affirmed above: that in our first coming to Christ there is needed the confirming seal of our pardon

and acceptance before God. Thus what is needed at the beginning for the confirmation of our faith is seen to be necessary for the confirmation of our hope; and this hope will be graduated through the whole after experience, according to the degrees of faith which the believer may attain.

3. *This doctrine of an assured hope rests so entirely upon the testimony of Scripture that the following citations are adduced under different forms of presentation.* First of all, those which directly affirm it. Thus we have hope defined in its relation to what is future in our salvation: "We are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it." (Rom. viii. 24, 25.) The same apostle dwells upon the continual increase of hope, "Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost." (Rom. xv. 13.) Again, "We through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith." (Gal. v. 5.) "By two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil." (Heb. vi. 18, 19.) The Apostle John, the beloved disciple, might be expected to dwell fondly upon this theme. Thus he says, "Whoso keepeth his word, in him

verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him." (1 John ii. 5.) "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." (1 John iii. 14.) "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life." (1 John v. 13.)

Again, we have hope presented in its connection with the believer's sanctification. Thus, "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?" (2 Cor. xiii. 5.) "Gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." (1 Peter i. 13.) "Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear." (1 Peter iii. 15.) "Give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly unto the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." (2 Peter i. 10, 11.)

Still further there are passages of Scripture which afford personal examples of this hope. Thus Paul declares of himself, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day." (2 Tim. i. 12.) "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of right-

eousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." (2 Tim. iv. 8.) The Apostle Peter also describes this as the privilege of all believers: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively (or living) hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." "Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." (1 Peter i. 3, 8.) These citations are but a tithe of what might be adduced: for one is surprised to discover how the Scriptures abound with testimonies to the reality of this hope in all of its different forms in Christian experience. Those presented above are left in bulk to make their combined impression upon the mind.

4. *The spiritual graces wrought into the character and life of the believer afford additional basis for an assured hope.* They are as follows: "Love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law." (Gal. v. 22, 23.) These virtues are gathered into a cluster; each being separate and distinct, yet all so interwoven as to make a necessary whole. They form Christian character: and may not irreverently be likened to the perfections of the Most High; each of which has its individual place, yet all blending into that holiness which is the glory of the divine character.

A slight analysis of these virtues will show how completely they enter into the Christian life. The first three are "love, joy, peace," describing the inward affections and emotions of a renewed soul. Love is mentioned first as the abiding force which pervades the believer's life. Peace is the serene atmosphere which he breathes from conscious reconciliation with God. Joy is the highest exhilaration of the human spirit in the moments of closest communion with Jehovah. Then follow in the second class "longsuffering, gentleness, goodness;" which describe the Christian's attitude towards the world without—patient under injuries, gentle towards all men, and abounding in acts of universal kindness. The last trio, "faith, meekness, temperance," present the final and fixed habit in which Christian character crystallizes and is confirmed to the end. Faith clings to the testimony of the divine word. Meekness is employed in Scripture almost technically to depict the humility, self-surrender and submission of the soul to God. Temperance is used in its broad sense of self-control and mastery over all the lusts and passions of the flesh. As these graces are all of them fruits of the Spirit, each in its turn furnishes evidence that the possessor is in a state of salvation; and when all of them are combined the evidence is cumulative and overwhelming. Indeed, in those moments when the Christian is in conscious possession of this evidence, either single or collective, it is scarcely possible for him to doubt the genuineness of his hope in Christ. This

evidence becomes the brighter when he compares these Christian traits with those of the unconverted world around him. The contrast between the two evinces plainly the nature of the spiritual life which he now leads by faith in Christ Jesus his Lord.

5. *The witness of the Spirit to his own work within the soul is the final ground on which to rest the assurance of hope.* In the chapter upon the fellowship with the Holy Spirit, his whole agency came necessarily into view. Nothing remains in this connection but to apply all that has been discussed to the believer's realization of his interest in Christ. Suffice it to say, that in the impartation and invigoration of the spiritual life is laid the foundation of Christian faith and hope alike. In every virtue which he develops in the believer's life his testimony is borne to the fact that we are truly the children of God. In the continued sealing of pardon upon the conscience through all the shades of Christian experience the same testimony is borne. In the sensible communion with God in all his acts of worship, both private and public, this witness of the Spirit is continually renewed. This restatement is made without expansion that the reader may gather together the various ways in which this testimony of the Spirit is given as to the reality of our Christian hope. "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God." (Rom. viii. 16.) "In whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance

until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory." (Eph. i. 13, 14.)

The reason why so much obscurity rests in many minds upon this doctrine of assurance is this—that few persons discriminate between temporary and permanent assurance. In our moments of high Christian enjoyment it is not possible to doubt our interest in Christ. Just in those moments the evidence of the fact is complete in the double testimony of our own consciousness and that of the Holy Spirit. The misfortune is that these moments are fleeting; and with them the conviction of our salvation vanishes. It is an intermittent assurance only that most Christians enjoy. In most cases, when the question is asked whether one is assured of his interest in Christ, the answer is returned promptly in the negative. His mind is fastened upon assurance of hope as the permanent habit of the soul; and he overlooks the fact that he has a hundred times been able to say with the apostle, "I know whom I have believed." It would clear up a good deal of mist which hangs around this particular truth to remember that no habit can be acquired without frequent reiteration of the single act. In the nature of the case, this hope must be intermittent in its manifestation, in order to its accretion into the final and fixed posture of the soul. As a fountain would cease to be even intermittent, except for the gush of the concealed waters in the womb of the earth; so, but for the real grace within the soul of the believer, there would be neither the intermittent

nor the permanent flow of the indwelling hope always springing up in every renewed soul.

An abiding assurance of hope is undoubtedly the privilege of all believers. Yet perhaps there are timid souls who shrink from its attainment upon very mistaken grounds. Some, for example, fear to acknowledge it lest it should seem to betray an ostentatious and self-righteous spirit; forgetting that it is the very essence of self-righteousness to assume the direction and control of their own spiritual life. Others, again, are afraid that such a feeling of security would lull them into negligence as to further duty and effort. A third class may be alarmed lest they should be betrayed into some fanatical delusion, the mere travesty of the hope in question. It may be well to enlarge a little upon this last point. Through the "deceitfulness of sin" divine truth is often changed into a lie; and this in exact proportion to its importance in the salvation of the soul. Satan is never so dangerous a foe as when he poses as an angel of light, and becomes the seeming advocate of truth. There is, however, a threefold protection against the danger of confounding a religious hope with any fanatical distortion of it. First, by bringing both to the word of God as revealed in the Scriptures. "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." (Isa. viii. 20.) The Bible is the unerring standard by which all Christian experience is to be tried. It would not be safe for even the best men to be left to the

interpretation of their own experience. The illusions into which they may be swept in moments of excitement may appear to be truth in its glorified form: but a single word from the Scriptures will break the bubble, which is filled only with air. Again, a true Christian hope rests always upon a double testimony—that of our own spirit and that of the Holy Ghost. (Rom. viii. 16.) In the case of all superstition, the latter testimony is always wanting. Still further, a true hope and its travesty are easily discriminated by the effects which they produce. The former is always sanctifying in its effect, producing deeper views of sin and a firmer grasp upon the doctrines of grace. The latter throws a veil over the secret nature of sin in its complete departure from holiness and God.

Discarding all these fears, it should be the Christian's aim to attain this highest assurance of hope; remembering that the degree of faith is always the measure of hope. There is no more fixed law in Christian experience than that announced by our Lord, "According to your faith be it unto you." (Matt. ix. 29). The benefits which flow from this hope are, even in this life, inconceivably great and precious. It is much to the Christian to live in serene composure amidst all the distractions of this present life. It is still more to be lifted above the agitation of doubts and fears of our own Christian state. But most of all is the gracious security of our hold upon the inheritance reserved for us above.

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